

Art and Culture of Tuscany and Lombardy

The Italian Renaissance to the Contemporary:
Florence, Siena, Sansepolcro, Monterchi, Arezzo,
Bergamo and Milan

with Claire Chamberlain

In the 14th and 15th centuries, Renaissance art and culture flowered here. We'll stay close to the heart of this wonderful city - within easy reach of the galleries, churches, palaces and museums that it is famed for (plus its fabulous bars, restaurants, markets and shopping). The tour will visit the major art sites of Florence, such as the Uffizi Gallery and also give access to the less touristy experiences which go under the radar.

We will use Florence as a base from which to travel by private coach to Siena whose artists rivalled the Florentine Giotto in the 14th century and also to Arezzo and the towns of Sansepolcro and Monterchi - part of the famed Piero Trail where art aficionados follow the work of the influential Piero della Francesca.

Finish in Milan to experience the full gamut of art from the 1400s to today.

Day 1: Florence - Saturday 4 October

Welcome to Florence!

After check-in, we will meet and take an orientation stroll/passeggiata around the historic centre of the city which is very walkable.

A gelato is recommended, but optional. Good shoes are essential.

We will pop into chapels, churches such as **Santa Trinita**, museums such as **Orsanmichele**, markets, the odd vintage store and familiarise ourselves with the major sights and how to get around them.

We'll go across **Ponte Vecchio** and visit the closeby church of **Santa Felicita** in Oltrarno where the Medici Family worshiped. It's still the home of **Jacopo Pontormo's** iridescent **Deposition**, a key work of early Mannerism.

We will return to our hotel for welcome drinks or find a local bar (Manifattura comes highly recommended).

Day 2: Florence - Sunday 5 October

Our first stop is to the tomb of the **Holy Sepulchre** in the **Rucellai Chapel** which is found in the deconsecrated San Pancrazio. The sepulchre was designed by architect, writer and influential theorist Leon Battista Alberti in the 15th century and is regarded as one of the jewels of his practice and of the Renaissance.

Also in San Pancrazio is the **Museum Marino Marini**. Marini was a 20th century Italian sculptor best known for his modernist figurative sculpture.

Afterwards, we will visit the small, but perfectly formed **Davanzati Palace Museum**. It offers insight into the role art played in the private home - as well as domestic altarpieces, there is also painted furniture and elaborate 'wallpaper' schemes.

Lunch and free time.

After meeting in **Piazza Santa Trinita**, our first visit is to **Palazzo Strozzi** to take in **Angelico**. The show, dedicated to the Brother/artist Fra Angelico, promises to be an unmissable event. The exhibition involves the restoration of masterpieces and the re-assembly for the first time ever of several of Angelico's great altarpieces that have been dispersed in museums throughout Europe and North America.

Next, we'll pop over to the **National Museum of Bargello**. It showcases the most important collection in the world of Italian Renaissance sculpture and includes Donatello's David, a perfect example of the new style with a primo derrière to boot.

In the Church of **Santa Croce**, a Franciscan church we'll find a plethora of works by artists such as Giotto, Lorenzo Monaco, Ghiberti and Donatello. If you've read or watched *A Room with a View* this is where Lucy Honeychurch ventures without her guidebook. We won't bother either.

Brunelleschi's famed **Pazzi Chapel** is also sited in the courtyard within the complex.

We return to our hotel via the riverside and hopefully catch the sun as it sets beyond Ponte Vecchio.

Day 3: Florence - Monday 6 October

Our first visit is to the **Church and Refectory of the Ognissanti** alongside the Arno.

In the refectory or dining hall of the church complex is a scene of the **Last Supper** by the 15th century painter **Ghirlandaio**. The refectory is only open a handful of times during the week. Inside the neighbouring church are works by Giotto, Botticelli and further paintings by Ghirlandaio.

Crossing over the Arno, we'll troop to find the **Contemporary Women's Art Gallery**, the home of FAF (Female Arts in Florence) in San Frediano en route to the church of Santa Maria del Carmine with its incredible **Brancacci Chapel** where Masaccio painted some of his most innovative frescoes.

After refuelling with coffee and/or gelato from Gelateria La Carraia, a small family owned shop, we'll cross Ponte La Carraia and walk back to **Piazza di Santa Maria Novella** and visit **Museo Novecento**, a modern art museum that focuses on local and international work of the 20th century. It has a changing array of touring exhibitions as well as permanent exhibits.

A visit to the nearby **Officina Profumo-Farmaceutica di Santa Maria Novella** which dates back to the 13th century, will leave us smelling sweet as we waft off for lunch.

Following lunch, we'll meet by the obelisk in front of **Santa Maria Novella** and admire the facade designed by Leon Battista Alberti and then proceed into the Dominican church. Here we will find **Masaccio's innovative Holy Trinity fresco** and a welter of works by Renaissance luminaries, including Ghirlandaio's famous frescoed chapel.

In the neighbouring cloister, **Paolo Uccello** painted a cycle of paintings in terra verde (green earth pigment) including the Deluge. His frescoes still bear witness to the devastating actual flood of 1966.

While in the attached museum, we'll find a panel depicting the **Last Supper**, painted **by Plautilla Nelli** - a significant female painter of the period - it was restored by the Advancing Women Artists (AWA) foundation after extensive international fundraising.

Free time

Day 4: Florence - Tuesday 7 October

We will be visiting the **Uffizi Gallery** as early as we can today. It opens at 8.15 am. The exact time will be to be confirmed once bookings are made.

We'll concentrate on the second level on this first visit. There are 45 halls on this floor alone which display works of art from the 13th to the 18th centuries with sculptures from antiquity lining the three corridors of this U-shaped building.

After stopping for a break in the cafeteria, we plan to join a private tour of the **Vasari Corridor** which has been closed since 2016. We should be able to walk across the Arno through the corridor and above the Ponte Vecchio to finish in the Boboli Gardens.

You're welcome to stay and explore further or you can walk back with the group to our hotel via the **Basilica of Santo Spirito** - Brunelleschi's plain-fronted 1400s church.

There is free time until we return to the **Uffizi Gallery** after dinner for a night visit. It's open until 10 pm.

This time we will explore level one where we'll find works by 17th and 18th century foreign painters and 15th century Tuscans, as well as marble sculptures from Hellenistic times. There are works by Raphael, Titian, Caravaggio and his contemporaries plus a lot more.

Exit is via the bookstore and a return to our hotel.

Day 5: Florence to Siena - Wednesday 8 October

Today we are travelling by private coach to Siena.

The city rivalled Florence in the 14th century in terms of politics, trade and art.

We saw paintings by the preeminent Siennese artists of the 14th century in the Uffizi - Duccio, Simone Martini and the Lorenzetti brothers, Ambrogio and Pietro. The altarpieces painted by Simone, Ambrogio and Pietro all came from this city and demonstrate delicacy of colour, linearity and interest in the burgeoning naturalism of the period.

After our coach has dropped us off we will take the short walk to the **Piazza del Campo**, a medieval shell-shaped square surrounded by elegant buildings and famous for hosting the Palio horse race.

The Campo slopes down to the **Palazzo Pubblico**, Siena's seat of government for over 700 years. After a bit of a reconnoiter and perhaps a coffee, we'll re-group to enter the palace. Inside, we'll find council rooms decorated with both religious and secular imagery, including **Simone Martini's** frescoed Maesta and a painted portrait of a Siennese mercenary in one room.

Next door, in the Room of the Nine, Ambrogio Lorenzetti's ambitious cityscapes representing Good and Bad Government will be nearing the completion of a massive restoration project.

After we've visited the communal palace, we'll pause to enjoy lunch and perhaps a spot of wine tasting at the nearby **Enoteca di Terzi**.

It's then just a five minute walk to the **Duomo of Siena**, the huge black and white striped Gothic cathedral with its mosaic floors which are often revealed during October and the St John the Baptist by Donatello to the right after the Piccolomini Library, the rose window by Duccio di Buoninsegna and the marble pulpit by Nicola Pisano.

The neighbouring **Museum of the Opera del Duomo** houses works of art and architectural fragments that were formerly in, or a part of, the Duomo of Siena, including Duccio's stupendous double-sided architectonic altarpiece completed in 1311.

The brave may be able to enjoy the panorama from the ill-fated extension to the Cathedral - finally abandoned after the Black Death had decimated Siena's population in 1348.

We'll return to the coach for our journey back to Florence.

Day 6: Florence - Thursday 9 October

This morning we will walk from our hotel to the San Lorenzo and San Marco districts. Our first stop is **Palazzo Riccardi Medici** and we're concentrating on the Medici Chapel decorated by **Bennozo Gozzoli**.

It's a lavish display of wealth and aligns the riches of the banking Medici to the only 'good' wealthy in the Bible - the Magi. It depicts the Adoration of the Magi in a brilliantly decorative and winding journey until they attend the Virgin Mary and the newborn Christ with their gifts.

In the courtyard, you can see where **Michelangelo** as a young teenager studied from the classical statuary the Medici collected, and, perhaps one of his earliest sculptures, **The Lapiths and the Centaurs**.

We'll retrace our steps a little, a stop for a quickish lunch at **Mercato Centrale**.

Nearby is the former convent of **Sant'Apollonia**. It is not oft-visited, but contains **Andrea del Castagno's Last Supper** in the refectory.

Castagno's Last Supper was painted in 1445/50. We've seen Ghirlandaio's version in the refectory of the Ognissanti and, shortly, we'll see another by the busy Domenico as part of the convent of San Marco.

The Dominican church complex is where the fiery brother, **Girolamo Savonarola** launched his attacks on the Medici. You want to see the cells for each of the brothers painted by **Fra Angelico** and later, his assistant **Bennozo Gozzoli**. There's an incredible fresco painted at the top of the stairs by Fra Angelico of The Annunciation.

Cosimo Medici supported San Marco prior to Savonarola's appearance and paid for much of the decoration. He also had a cell here. It's decorated with the Adoration of the Magi, but he seemed to get a king size suite with en suite.

The **Ospedale degli Innocenti Museum** is next up. It is closeby and a must-see. The exterior facade is designed by **Filippo Brunelleschi** who also finally mastered the construction of the dome of the Florence Cathedral.

The museum also has a fabulous cafe/bar with an outside terrace that overlooks Florence's centro with a marvellous view of the Duomo.

Free-time follows, and you can consider popping into the neighbouring **Church of Santissima Annunziata**. It has many frescoes by Mannerist artists, including **Andrea del Sarto** and a Pontormo Visitation.

Your evening is free.

Day 7: Florence to Arezzo: The Piero Trail - Friday 10 October

Today we are heading by private coach to three pivotal stops on **The Piero Trail** where we can add to our understanding of Piero della Francesca's style after seeing the Umbrian artist's phenomenal double-sided allegorical portrait of the Duke and Duchess of Urbino in the Uffizi.

Sansepolcro, formerly Borgo Santo Sepolcro, is a town and comune in the province of Arezzo, and is the birthplace of our painter **Piero della Francesca**.

According to tradition, the town was founded by pilgrims who brought a stone from the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with them from the Holy Land. During World War II the town was saved from destruction by the efforts of Tony Clarke, a British Royal Horse Artillery officer who halted the Allied artillery attack in order to save Piero della Francesca's Resurrection.

Our focus is the **Museo Civico**. The English writer Aldous Huxley described the **Resurrection by Piero della Francesca**, which is in the Museo Civico, as "the greatest painting in the world".

Piero della Francesca was born in Sansepolcro around 1412 and this city hosts four works by the artist in the Museum. We will also see the house where Piero was born and take in the distinctive character of Sansepolcro which, outside of those following the Trail, isn't oft-visited.

We will have lunch here and then hop back on the bus for the short journey to the hilltop town of **Monterchi**. It really would not be visited were it not for the enigmatic **Madonna del Parto** that Piero painted for the town's funerary chapel. Purportedly, Piero's mother was buried here and the painting of the pregnant Virgin Mary is a poignant theme.

Our last stop is to the much larger city of Arezzo.

Heavily bombed during WWII and eventually liberated by New Zealand forces, the upper historic part of the city is home to the astonishing cycle of frescoes painted by Piero in the **Church of San Francesco**. The cycle deals with the Legend of the True Cross, a rather lofty subject that Piero relays in an inventive and pictorially convoluted manner. It is revelatory and has influenced generations of painters from Cezanne in the 19th century to contemporaneous artists.

We'll also visit the cathedral where Piero's painted a depiction of Mary Magdalene.

There are wonderful bars and restaurant which line the sloping square. We'll have free time to enjoy these before returning to the coach and ultimately to our hotel and Florence for dinner.

Day 8: Florence - Saturday 11 October

For our last day in Florence there is free time until the late afternoon. Please enjoy a sleep in, shopping or anything still on your to do list and/or a long lunch (it would also be a good idea to pack!).

Meet at our hotel dressed for dinner and we will travel by taxi to the church of **San Salvi** on the other side of Florence for Andrea del Sarto's wonderful Last Supper - our fifth!

Then it's up to **Fiesole** (just like A Room with A View!) for our own last supper.

Prior to dinner, we'll view the Roman amphitheatre, the Etruscan walls and possibly the Villa Medici and its gardens before we dine overlooking Florence as the sun sets.

Farewell Florence

Day 9: Florence to Milan - Sunday 12 October

Depart to Milano this morning.

The regional capital of Lombardy, Milan is the centre of fashion and design. It's also the birthplace of the Negroni cocktail! It has a welter of fantastic art galleries and museums that exhibit the absolute contemporary as well as important historical masterpieces.

Welcome to Milano!

The coach will then take us to **Santa Maria delle Grazie** where we have a booking to see Leonardo da Vinci's Last Supper*. After seeing paintings of the same subject by earlier Renaissance artists in Florence, we'll really be able to appreciate what makes Leonardo's so innovative.

After check-in and time to get settled, we'll meet to enjoy a tour around the **Duomo di Milan** and visit the **Observatory Fondazione Prada**, a contemporary art gallery which sits in and above the stupendous Galleria Vittorio di Emmanuelle II - one of the most impressive and historic ... shopping malls!

Once settled in Milan, we'll have a chance to enjoy the signature Negroni Sbagliato (served with the lighter prosecco, rather than gin) at the renowned Bar Basso.

The evening is free for you to dine or rest.

Day 10: Milan - Monday 13 October

First up, there's an early morning visit to climb the **Duomo's famous rooftop terraces** - not for those with a fear of heights (or for those who'd prefer a sleep in!). Luckily we can take the lift up and the view is incredible.

The exhibition **Man Ray** which opens in September at **Palazzo Reale** will examine this influential figure of 20th century art history - particularly in relation to Surrealism. Man Ray was among the first artists to fully embrace photography as a creative medium.

After a break for lunch, we'll make the short walk to **Museo Poldi Pozzoli** in which we'll find the penultimate work by **Piero della Francesca** in this charming house museum.

Note, we'll be close to Via Monte Napoleone which was judged the world's most expensive street in retail in 2024 when Milan deposed New York. For those keen on vintage and thrifting, Milan is also famous for its vintage clothing stores and there are a myriad nearby.

The later afternoon and evening are free for you to do as you wish

Day 11: Milan - Tuesday 14 October

Today we escape Milan and head via private coach to the beautiful and historic hilltop town of **Bergamo**.

Bergamo is northeast of Milan and about an hour away, but still in the Lombardy region. It was originally part of the Venice Republic, although its history dates back to the Etruscans and the Ancient Romans. The older upper district, called Città Alta, is characterised by cobblestone streets, encircled by Venetian walls and is accessible by funicular.

We'll be dropped by a private bus just above the centre of the Città Alta and walk through to Piazza Vecchia which is at its political and social heart. It's home to an array of historic buildings including the **Duomo di Bergamo**, **Palazzo di Ragione** and the **Palazzo del Podestà**.

After a short break for coffee, we'll meet and take the stairs to the medieval **Palazzo di Ragione** where an exhibition by contemporary Italian artist **Maurizio Cattelan** is installed amongst the theocratic frescoes.

Cattelan is something of an artist 'riddler'. His work 'Comedian', consisting of a banana taped to an auction house wall was bought in late 2024 and soon eaten by the successful bidder to global cries of 'emperor's new clothes!'. Cattelan's work is always conceptually challenging and widely varied in its form. Who knows what we'll encounter?

You have free time for lunch and further sightseeing in this perfect hilltop town before we depart via the funicular down to Città Basso and walk to the historic art museum of the **Accademia Carrara** which exhibits works from the 15th–19th centuries by celebrated artists.

We'll finish with spritz and antipasti (sounds so much better than drinks and snacks!) at the connected Bū Bistrot after enjoying the art gardens developed alongside the Accademia Carrara.

Both gardens and bistrot were opened in late 2024.

Our coach will be waiting nearby to take us back to Milan where your evening is free.

Day 12: Milan - Wednesday 15 October

Our private coach will collect us and take us to the **Pirelli HangarBicocca** which opens at 10.30 am.

Pirelli HangarBicocca is a site for contemporary art exhibitions, located in the Bicocca district of Milan, Italy. The building used to be a Pirelli factory. It was converted into 10,900 square metres of exhibition galleries in 2012.

We will have a tour scheduled of **Anselm Kiefer's 'The Seven Heavenly Palaces'**, a monumental installation which is permanently housed in this former industrial space and is one of Kiefer's most important site specific works.

There will also be a temporary exhibition '**This Will Not End Well**' by the phenomenal and challenging Nan Goldin. We'll have lunch in the on-site bistro and then the coach will drop us near the amazing **Villa Necchi Campiglio**, an 1930s architectural gem. We can have a bite to eat and refreshments in a bar nestled in the gardens of the villa before leaving and walking past the vine covered **Villa Mozart** where the composer stayed and then past 'architectural jazz' of the '30s Palazzo Fidia.

After a leisurely walk along wonderful shopping streets, we'll return to our hotel. The later afternoon and evening are free.

Day 13: Milan - Thursday 16 October

This morning we walk to the **Pinacoteca di Brera**, an incredible gallery that houses a collection that is rich in Italian Renaissance and Baroque art and includes work by Michelangelo, Mantegna, Bellini, Michelangelo, Raphael, Caravaggio, Canova and Piero della Francesca.

What a way to finish on our last full day!

The Brera museum, conceived under Napoleon as a 'little Louvre', has an astonishing array of Italian masterpieces taken from areas conquered by Napoleon's army from Venice and across the peninsular.

After lunch, we'll walk just a few doors from the main gallery to **The Brera Modern**, in the nearby remodelled Palazzo Citterio. The Brera Modern has been planned for over 50 years and only opened in December 2024.

It is now home to one of the world's most important collections of 20th century Italian art, with a particular focus on Modigliani and Giorgio Morandi.

The overall collection is broad ranging though and includes everything from Byzantine mosaics to works by Pablo Picasso.

Stay in the Brera District for a spritz and then meet back later at the hotel for our own last supper at a beautiful Milan restaurant.

Day 14: Milan - Friday 17 October

Farewell Italia.

We make our departure for home today or onwards to further travels. Transfers to airports and train stations can be arranged.

****Itinerary and inclusions are always subject to change****

About Claire

Claire Chamberlain (MA Art History with Hons, PGDipEd) currently teaches as part of the Art Today programme at Te Tuhi, one of New Zealand's foremost contemporary art spaces. Prior to this, she was a secondary teacher of art history for over 20 years.

Claire is the co-head of New Zealand at Venice Biennale Patrons, a patron herself since 2017 and was an invigilator for Lisa Reihana's Emissaries at the 57th Venice Biennale. A keen supporter of Aotearoa arts and artists, Claire is passionate about communicating her love of art and art history in an accessible and enjoyable way.

About ArtTravel

Glen Armstrong started taking groups to enjoy art and travel in 2007. Since then ArtTravel has enjoyed helping life long learners enjoy art and cultural destinations around Auckland, New Zealand, Australia, Europe, the USA and South America.