



The Grand Canal, Venice – with trade came plague

Legacies of Plagues

A social and medical history tour of Italy, France and England

19 September – 5 October 2026



Level 1
MODERATE





Florence as the sun sets – surviving the plague in style

Plague has shaped our world. From ancient times through the Black Death to COVID-19, our medical, economic, culinary, social and art history has been irrevocably influenced by plague.

This tour follows the route of the Black Death through Europe, where it was first introduced by Genovese and Venetian merchants. Travelling through a range of beautiful European cities, each day will focus on a legacy of plague; from marmots to mustard, to perfumes and pleasure, to conspiracies and scapegoats, onto art, architecture and town planning; learn the myriad ways plague has affected our world.

Starting in opulent Venice, journey beneath Mediterranean skies through the warm hues of central Italy, visiting Padua, Ferrara, Bologna and Tuscany's treasure, Florence. Continue to the revitalised port city of Genoa before crossing into France, pausing in the captivating Riviera towns of Grasse, Marseille and Avignon. Conclude in the great capitals of Paris and London.

Guided by the expert insights of Dr Norman Swan, this comprehensive itinerary features specialist visits, engaging talks, and curated experiences led by skilled guides and speakers. With excellent accommodation, fine dining and regional wines, there is ample opportunity to savour the flavours, scenery and atmosphere of Europe's most historic cities.

'Visits were most interesting, local guides were very good and extremely knowledgeable.'

Michael Tremouth, *Legacies of Plague*, May 2024

THIS TOUR IS CLASSED AS:

Level 3 | Moderate



Regular walking at destinations, extended standing and /or increased travel distances. Good fitness is required.

Speaker - Dr Norman Swan



Norman Swan AM FAHMS is a Scottish-born Australian physician, journalist, and broadcaster. Trained in medicine and paediatrics in Aberdeen, London, and

Sydney, he joined the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC), where he hosts *The Health Report* on Radio National and co-hosted *Coronacast* during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A Gold Walkley Award winner, Norman has reported for 7.30, *Midday*, *News Breakfast*, and *Four Corners*, and created *Invisible Enemies*, a Channel 4 documentary on pandemics broadcast in 27 countries. He has received the medal of the Australian Academy of Science and an honorary MD from the University of Sydney.

Norman has three best selling books: *So You Think You Know What's Good For You*, *So You Want to Live Younger Longer* and *So You Want to Know What's Good for Your Kids*. His latest book which will be out in mid 2026 is on brain ageing.

Tour Leader – Scilla Delmastro



Scilla Delmastro was born and raised in Piedmont, a region rich in history and culture, and famous for wonderful wine and gastronomy. Her name

was inspired by a small town in Calabria, located on a rock overlooking Sicily, and the origin of the Odysseus' myth of Scilla and Cariddi. Since childhood languages

have always been Scilla's passion. After getting a degree in modern languages (English, Spanish and French) Scilla obtained a tour director license which allowed her to transform her great interests for travel, discovery and language into a profession she loves.

Scilla is also interested in history and science and led the Legacies of Plagues tour through Italy and France in 2024. Scilla was a highly professional and organized tour leader and an entertaining and popular traveling companion. In her words, *"That last tour was an amazing experience, so enriching and fascinating and I can't wait to repeat with you!"*

Tour Leader – Janice Liverseidge



Janice Liverseidge was formerly Director of Membership at the Royal Society of Medicine and now works full time as a guide. She is a trustee

of the Royal Medical Benevolent Fund and the London Handel Festival, and a registered Blue Badge tourist guide.

Janice leads medical history walks and tours of the Wellcome Collection, healthcare sites, and museums including the Foundling Museum and the London Handel Festival. She has travelled widely, leading successful RSM tours all over the world.

'Norman was superb! He has a generous outlook on history and medicine, and he enhanced the tour immeasurably.'

Patrick Alley, Legacies of Plague, May 2024

Itinerary 19 September – 5 October 2026

B = Breakfast **L** = Lunch **D** = Dinner

2 nights Venice – 2 nights Ferrara – 3 nights Florence – 2 nights Genoa –
2 nights Marseille – 3 nights Paris – 2 nights London



Day 1: Venice (Sat, 19 Sep)

D

The origins of the Black Death – from Kyrgyzstan: Marmots, Rats, and Fleas

Pm: Arrive in Venice, check in to the Hotel Splendid Venice and tour overview.

Eve: Welcome dinner at a local restaurant.

and paintings depicting the plague, including masterpieces by Tintoretto. Continue to the Fondaco dei Turchi and Ca' d'Oro, exquisite examples of Venetian Gothic architecture, then walk across the Ponte di Rialto.

Day 2: Venice (Sun, 20 Sep)

B

Trade and the Plague - Caravanserai, Warriors, Merchants and Ships

Am: Glide through canals and discover how Venice rose as a maritime empire connecting East and West along the Silk Road. Continue to Isola del Lazzaretto Nuovo, where contagious visitors were isolated in an early example of quarantine.

Pm: Visit the Scuola Grande di San Rocco, founded in 1478 to aid plague victims, its ceilings blaze with magnificent works by Tintoretto and Zanchi. Stop at the Church of San Rocco, notable for its sculptures

Day 3: Venice/Padua/Ferrara

(Mon, 21 Sep)

B D

Understanding and Rationalising the Plague

Am: Drive to Padua and visit its lovely botanical gardens, dating back to 1545.

Pm: Guided tour of the beautiful Renaissance anatomical theatre – the oldest in the world – at Padua University's medical school. Continue to the Scrovegni Chapel to see the Giotto frescoes (1310). Drive to Ferrara and check in.

Day 4: Ferrara (Tues, 22 Sep)

B D

Mitigation, Quarantine and Public Health

Am: On a walking tour, find out how the city

kept 17th century plague losses low, using border controls, sanitary laws, and personal hygiene.

Pm: At leisure with the option of a drink in Antica Enoteca Al Brindisi, the oldest bar in the world, dating back to 1100. Dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 5: Ferrara/Bologna/Florence (Wed, 23 Sep)

B D

The Good the Bad and the Anatomical

Am: Drive to Bologna for a guided walking tour of the terracotta centre. Visit the 'good' and 'bad' hospitals and the Museo di Palazzo Poggi with its fascinating anatomical wax models.

Pm: Enjoy a glass of wine at Osteria del Sole, Bologna's oldest bar, dating back to 1465 and little changed by the centuries. Continue to Florence.

Eve: Check in and dinner at local restaurant.

Day 6: Florence (Thurs, 24 Sep)

B L

Surviving the Plague

Am: Walk to Santa Maria Novella Pharmacy, established in 1221 by Dominican monks. Visit the Ospedale degli Innocenti, built in the early 1400s as Europe's first orphanage and regarded as the first fully Renaissance building. Its gallery contains splendid artworks, including a Botticelli.

Pm: Lunch at a rooftop cafe with views. Visit the eclectic La Specola Museum, founded as the personal collection of the Medici family in 1771 and renowned for its detailed eighteenth-century wax anatomical models.

Day 7: Florence (Fri, 25 Sep)

B L

Plagues and Art

Am: Walking tour of the city, including the stunning Cathedral, the Baptistry, Giotto's Bell Tower, and Piazza della Signoria, home to magnificent sculptures. Cross the Ponte Vecchio, lined with traditional jewellers, then explore Piazza Santa Croce with its ancient wine windows — small openings once used during the plague, now revived as buchette del vino.

Pm: At leisure with the option to visit the Museo Galileo or the Uffizi.

Day 8: Florence/Lucca/Genoa (Sat, 26 Sep)

B L

Maritime Routes

Am: Drive via Lucca and take a walking tour through its maze of medieval streets and piazzas. Learn about the role of walls in offering protection and controlling plague in the medieval world.

Pm: Visit a winery in the Lucca area for lunch



Marseille, where plague arrived in the wake of greed and corruption



and a wine tasting. Continue to Genoa, check in to the hotel and at leisure.

Day 9: Genoa (Sun, 27 Sep)

B D

The Knights of St John

Am: Wander the intricate carruggi (alleyways) in the heart of Genoa's medieval centre. Visit the Capuchin Convent of Annunziata di Portoria, where lies the mummified body of St. Catherine of Genoa, carer for the poor and sick during the plague. Visit the Church of Maddalena and the gilded Basilica del Vastato with its plague-era art. Conclude at the Commenda di San Giovanni di Pré (the Commandery of the Order of St John), a Romanesque complex of churches, convent and hospital that once served both as a hospice and a maritime station for pilgrims en route to the Holy Land.

Pm: At leisure. Option to visit Galata Museum, an excellent, modern maritime museum located a short walk away.

Eve: Dinner at a local restaurant.

Day 10: Genoa/Marseille (Mon, 28 Sep) **B D**

Perfume and Pleasures

Am: Enjoy a scenic drive along the French Riviera, stop at Nice's iconic Promenade

des Anglais, named after the many English visitors who came here to convalesce from 'consumption'.

Pm: Visit the charming town of Grasse, the world's perfume capital, and explore Fragonard Parfumeur, with its museum and historic workshop. In medieval times, the herbs of Provence were often worn in clasps around the neck to ward off the plague, while perfumes helped to mask the stench of death and decay. Continue to the great port city of Marseille.

Eve: Dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 11: Marseille (Tues, 29 Sep)

B

Conspiracies and Scapegoats

Am: Tour Marseille's historic quarter, which was struck by plague in 1720 despite an elaborate system of protective measures. Learn how politics and profit overturned public health strategies and the resulting tragic consequences. See the old Marseille General Hospital and visit 'Le Panier' to learn about the history of La Vieille Charité, a former alms-house. Visit the Musée des Beaux-Arts and see two huge paintings depicting the Great Plague that ravaged Marseille.

Pm: At leisure. Option to visit the soap factory.

Eve: Optional bouillabaisse dinner.

Day 12: Marseille/Avignon/Paris (Wed, 30 Sep)

B

Divine Wrath

Am: Drive to Avignon and explore the city, which at the time of the Black Death was head of the Catholic Church. During the plague, Pope Clement attributed the plague to divine wrath, preached tolerance and ordered the church to care for the people. Take a guided visit of the impressive Palais des Papes, a symbol of religious and political power.

Pm: Take the high-speed train to Paris, transfer to the elegant Hotel Les Jardins du Marais and at leisure.

Day 13: Paris (Thurs, 1 Oct)

B

Town Planning and Unusual Plague Remedies

Am: Guided tour exploring how Paris was redesigned by Baron Haussmann for the health of its densely populated inhabitants. This included a new sewer system and wide boulevards to efficiently put down 'unhealthy' riots and insurrections. See Hôpital Hôtel-Dieu, the oldest Parisian hospital, founded in 651 and still in operation.

Pm: Guided tour of La Boutique Maille, which opened in 1747. Take part in a private mustard tasting and learn about their plague cures.

Day 14: Paris (Fri, 2 Oct)

B D

A Moveable Feast

Am: Full day at leisure to enjoy the many delights of Paris. Explore the vibrant Marais district, known for its markets, shops, cafés and restaurants alongside former palaces and local art galleries, including the Musée Picasso. Optional visit to the Paris Catacombs or Notre Dame.

Eve: Enjoy dinner in a local restaurant.

Day 15: Paris/London (Sat, 3 Oct)

B D

Fire and Rebirth

Am: Board Eurostar to London and transfer to The Marylebone Hotel.

Pm: Visit Charterhouse Square, one of London's largest plague pits. Meet with Jelena Bekvalac, curator (Human Osteology) at the Museum of London and hear about lessons and legacies from recent archaeological digs in London. Explore the narrow byways of the City of London to see how the plague and Great Fire of 1666 ravaged the city and how it was rebuilt.

Eve: Dinner at the Royal Society of Medicine.

Day 16: London (Sun, 4 Oct)

B D

The Great Stink

Am: Soho walking tour in the footsteps of Dr John Snow to learn about the evolution of epidemiology in the 19th century and its role in combating cholera. End at the John Snow Pub.

Pm: At leisure.

Eve: Farewell dinner.

Day 17: London (Mon, 5 Oct)

B

Am: Check out of the hotel after breakfast.

All itineraries are subject to change, according to local conditions.



Boutique Maille, Paris – the mustard connection



Hôtel Dieu Intercontinental Marseille

Hotels

Splendid Venice (Venice)

Dating back to the sixteenth century, the former Venetian townhouse is now a stylish hotel. With a private dock and rooftop lounge, it overlooks the canals and the old streets that link Piazza San Marco and the Rialto Bridge, close to Piazza San Marco.

Radisson Hotel Ferrara (Ferrara)

The hotel offers understated modern comfort, with relaxed bar and restaurant areas. The main landmarks of this Renaissance city are a leisurely 15-minute walk away.

NH Firenze (Florence)

Set just off the river, the hotel is a pleasant stroll along the Arno to the city centre. Recently refurbished in a contemporary style, it features comfortable, spacious rooms, an elegant dining area and a roof terrace with a pool, bar and restaurant.

NH Collection Genova Marina (Genova)

Designed by Renzo Piano, this distinctive modern building arches over Genoa's regenerated Old Port area. Rooms are stylish with muted tones and you can enjoy meals

and drinks overlooking the harbour from the waterside terraces of the hotel restaurant.

Hôtel Dieu Intercontinental (Marseille)

Located on Panier Hill, the oldest district of Marseille, Hotel Dieu is a grandiose luxury hotel. Rooms are large, plush and offer exceptional views across Marseille. Interiors are in keeping with the city's natural mineral tones, with lovely spa and fitness facilities and a range of chic bars and restaurants.

Les Jardins du Marais (Paris)

Located in the heart of the hip Le Marais district, Les Jardins du Marais provides spacious rooms, particularly for Paris, and a private garden terrace with a restaurant serving French-inspired contemporary cuisine.

The Marylebone Hotel (London)

Part of the Doyle Collection, this stylish hotel is in the heart of Marylebone. It has a chic lobby, cocktail bar, brasserie and bar, alongside elegant, contemporary rooms. Guests have complimentary access to the excellent on-site Third Space health club, which has a gym, a spa and pool.

In the Footsteps of Plague



1346 1347 1348 1349 1350 1351 1352 1353

--- Approximate border between the Principality of Kiev and the Golden Horde - passage prohibited for Christians.

Land trade routes
Maritime trade routes

Map showing the spread of the Black Death in Europe between 1346 and 1353

The deadliest plague in Europe's history devastated humanity. The medieval Black Death killed between 30-50% of Europe's population - which would take two centuries to recover - and changed society forever.

A recent study concluded that it also left a genetic mark. By analysing the DNA of centuries-old skeletons, scientists found mutations that helped people survive the plague. Intriguingly, these mutations are linked to modern-day autoimmune diseases, such as Crohn's Disease - so what helped keep our ancestors alive 700 years ago could be damaging our health today. It had been generally accepted that the Black

Death arrived in Europe from central Asia in 1347 - until 2022, when researchers pinpointed the precise origins of the Black Death in Kyrgyzstan in the 1330s. A research team from the University of Stirling in Scotland and Germany's Max Planck Institute and University of Tübingen analysed ancient DNA samples from the teeth of skeletons near Lake Issyk Kul, in Kyrgyzstan, after noting a significant spike in burials there in 1338 and 1339.

It spread rapidly across the continent from the Mediterranean ports, crossing the English Channel. The contagion was carried by fleas (or human lice, according to a 2018 study) and



Charterhouse Square – one of London's largest plague pits

incubated for 3-5 days before symptoms appeared. 80% of all afflicted died within a further 3-5 days. The pestilence travelled steadily along the extensive trade networks of the medieval period, as can be seen on the map above.

According to scholar George Childs Kohn, the myriad causes of plague were believed to include bad air and water, hot and humid southerly winds, the proximity of swamps, lack of purifying sunshine, excrement, decomposing bodies, excessive indulgence in foods (especially fruits), God's wrath, retribution for sins, and the conjunction of stars and planets.

By the time the plague had run its course, over 30 million people were dead. European society was transformed, with the end of the feudal system, wages for former serfs and the elevation of women's status as many survived

their male relatives and assumed their roles. The Black Death is widely agreed to mark the end of the Middle Ages and the start of the modern age. People's disillusionment with the religious, political, and medical paradigms of the past inspired them to seek alternatives, and these would eventually find full expression in the Renaissance, which lay the foundation for the modern era.

In other links between past and present, approaches to the Black Death reflect responses to the recent pandemic. Our understanding of the causes of disease has moved on, but even in medieval Europe there was great variation in how the Black Death affected different cities. Those that successfully kept the plague at bay used approaches we are now very familiar with - quarantine, social distancing, border controls, sanitary laws and personal hygiene.

Wine window, Florence – opened in the 14th century and re-opened in the 21st





Big Ben and the Thames, London (top); Scrovegni Chapel, Padua – see fresco with famous paintings by Giotto; Parfumerie Fragonard, Grass; Piazza Cattedrale, Ferrara (above)

The cost of the tour is £8,500 per person sharing

The cost of the tour per person with a room to yourself is £10,788

The cost of the tour includes:

- All internal transport
- 16 nights' accommodation in first class and medium grade hotels with private facilities
- The services of speaker, Norman Swan
- The services of tour leaders, Scilla Delmastro (Italy & France) Janice Liversedge (London)
- The services of local guides, specialists and curators at each destination
- A full programme of cultural visits, excursions and activities as detailed in the itinerary above
- Meals as specified
- All admission fees and tips

The cost excludes

- International flights and airport transfers
- Meals not mentioned
- Drinks not mentioned
- All optional excursions, tours and visits; all personal extras such as portage, laundry and inoculation fees; travel insurance and visas where applicable

'Scilla was unbelievably outstanding, best tour guide ever!'

Jill Conomy, Legacies of Plague, May 2024

'Janice was outstanding, providing humour, information and excellent organisation.'

Dr Paul G Davies, Medicine and Society in North India, March 25

NB: All itineraries are subject to change according to local conditions.

About Us

To travel with us is to dig below the surface, revealing the deeper destination. Of course, you will visit the great historical sites; marvel at the wonders of architecture and engineering; be moved by the riches of culture and art; and experience the most spectacular landscapes in the world. What we also do is make sure that you see the country as it is today, giving you privileged access that independent travel and other tour companies rarely get close to. We give you a variety of experiences, from the sublime to the humble, in the company of intelligent, curious, like-minded people. And while we can be worthy, we also make sure that you have a lot of fun.

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Piazza Maggiore, Bologna (top); The Renaissance Anatomical Theatre in Padua University; The Grand Canal, Venice (above)



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