



There's No Place Like ROME

ANCIENT AND MODERN FASCINATIONS UNFOLD
IN ITALY'S INCOMPARABLE CAPITAL CITY.
BY STACEY MORRIS

Clockwise from top left:
Monument to Vittorio
Emanuele II; Ponte
Sant'Angelo and St.
Peter's Basilica; Vatican
City; Bernini's Canopy in
St. Peter's Basilica;
Piazza Venezia







FROM THE VANTAGE POINT of one of its seven fabled hills, Rome unfolds like a tapestry woven in pale beige clusters accented with terracotta. But beyond the color scheme, the Eternal City is, at its essence, a captivating blend of ancient and modern. Each morning as the sun rises over timeworn ruins and baroque duomos, city buses, Fiats, cyclists and pedestrians jockey to negotiate the bustling streets of the city named nearly more than 2,500 years ago after the ruler Romulus, who, according to Roman mythology, founded Rome with his twin brother, Remus.

The Roman Republic, which began about 500 B.C. and eventually dominated much of the Mediterranean region, gave way to the Roman Empire. After the fall of empirical Rome, the Holy Roman Empire emerged and came to dominate most of Europe. The empire may be long gone, but tangible remnants have endured, in some cases for millennia.

Even to those who have never ventured there, Rome evokes familiarity. If only by reputation, it's understood that a visit to Italy's capital will likely entail some combination of the Colosseum, the Roman Forum and Vatican City

with its Sistine Chapel, as well as some monuments and opulent fountain squares for good measure. While it may seem a bit cliché to make the rounds of such oft-photographed and filmed locations, the reality is, trodding the ground where some of the most famous, and infamous, figures in world history once walked is an experience that's as fascinating as it is unforgettable.

Ancient Wonders

With the exception of the grand buildings in Vatican City, such as St. Peter's Basilica, most of the city's ancient ruins and religious sites are situ-

ated on the east side of the Tiber River, which bisects Rome like an undulating serpent. The Pantheon is one of the best-preserved buildings dating back to ancient Rome (built by Agrippa circa 27 B.C. as a temple to the gods). After being destroyed by fire, it was completely rebuilt around 125 A.D., and in 609 was consecrated as a church by Pope Boniface IV. Used as a tomb since the Renaissance, it is the final resting place of painter Raphael and Italian kings Vittorio Emanuele II and Umberto I, among others.

The Roman Forum, set in the center of Rome, is an intriguing swath of ruins of ancient monuments, temples and basilicas. Built in the 6th century B.C. on drained marshland, it's now one of Europe's most visited archeological sites. Nearby, the Capitoline Hill (Campidoglio) is considered the most sacred of Rome's seven hills. Home to the sacrosanct Temple of Jupiter (in which Brutus and his accomplices locked themselves after murdering

Julius Caesar), the hill's current main attraction is the Capitoline Museum, showcasing ancient Roman artifacts, including an original 2nd-century B.C. bronze statue of Marcus Aurelius and the head from a giant bronze statue of Constantine.

Perhaps nothing is more emblematic of Rome than the Colosseum, the ancient but still-standing amphitheater where Romans once turned out in droves to witness bloody gladiatorial fights, as well as elaborate stage productions nearly two millennia ago.

Nowadays, it's crowds of tourists who flock to the Colosseum to snap photos of what remains. Locals love pointing out that the hallowed site and its now-deserted passages and tunnels serve as a feline hotel after sunset for the city's ubiquitous stray cats. Next to the Colosseum, the Arch of Constantine also cuts an impressive silhouette in the Roman skyline. The towering ivory structure carved in high-relief with triple portals commemorates the Battle of Milvian Bridge in 312 A.D., which resulted in Constantine's conversion to Christianity.

It wouldn't be a visit to Rome without a stop in Vatican City, the sovereign city-state within Rome that serves as the papal enclave. Visitors of all religions will marvel at the grandeur of St. Peter's Square and Basilica. The wide-open square that lies before St. Peter's Basilica is framed by two mammoth semicircular Doric colonnades topped with 140 statues of saints. The sprawling space is where crowds traditionally gather for Christmas and Easter services hoping to catch glimpses of the pope. Anyone who has ever watched the televised Midnight Mass on Christmas Eve will recognize the opulent interior of St. Peter's Basilica, the centerpiece of which is the papal altar. The first

chapel of the north aisle is home to Michelangelo's *Pietà*, and the Vatican grottoes beneath the basilica house a cache of papal tombs, including that of John Paul II. For some of the most panoramic views of Rome, climb the steps to the top of the basilica's dome.

Bear in mind the basilica's strictly enforced dress code, particularly if visiting during summer months. Shorts, miniskirts and bare shoulders are prohibited, and entrance attendants won't hesitate to turn away improperly dressed visitors.

The nearby Vatican Museums contain such a vast assemblage of art, it's divided into a complex of pontifical museums and galleries and boasts everything from ancient Egyptian art and hieroglyphics to tapestries, ceramics and a sea of famous paintings. If you're a diehard art lover and want to see the collection in its entirety, plan on devoting two to three days. And don't miss the Sistine Chapel. After a 10-year restoration process that concluded in 1994, Michelangelo's masterful depictions of biblical stories are a dazzling kaleidoscope of color.

Modern Pleasures

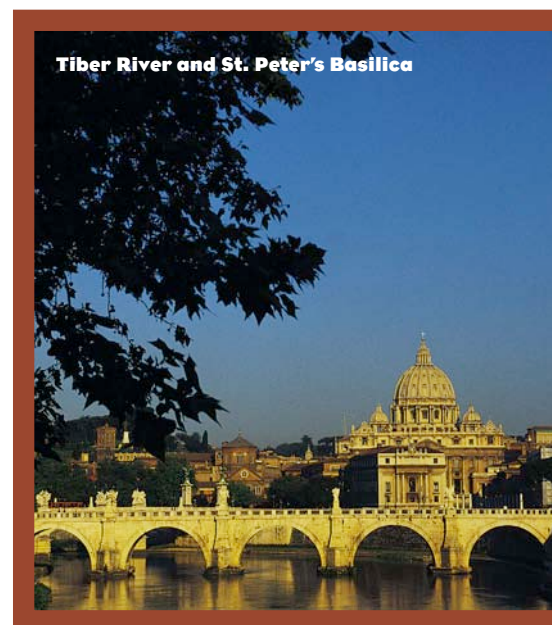
In addition to its great history and art, Rome is also known for shopping districts ubiquitous enough to give the most seasoned retail therapists a run for their money. Many boutiques and gift stores can be found near the Piazza di Spagna, home of the famous Spanish Steps. Probably the most celebrated shopping corridor is the Via Condotti just off the base of the steps. You may not actually rack up a string of purchases on this swanky street, known as Rome's Madison Avenue, where many top designers such as Versace, Armani and Prada have boutiques, but window-shopping is a great way to catch your second wind. And if you're visiting dur-

ing the showing of the spring and fall collections, you may even encounter a runway model or two. For shopping that's more affordable, climb the Spanish Steps and head towards Via Francesco Crispi.

Cuisine alla Romana

Rome is a quintessential walking city, and any combination of shopping and sightseeing is sure to work up an appetite. Fortunately, Rome also abounds with good cafés and trattorias. Roman cuisine is simple and rustic in nature, centering on roasted meats and fish with vegetable and pasta side dishes. A signature dish is Saltimbocca alla Romana, prosciutto-wrapped veal cutlets sautéed with fresh sage in olive oil. Although the food in Italy tends to be universally appetizing, it's still a good rule of thumb when scouting for restaurants to venture at least three blocks away from monuments or famous sites to avoid the tourist menus common on some streets.

Pasta isn't the only food for which Italians are renowned. Some of the best gelato (ice cream) in the world can be found in Rome. And java-lovers will

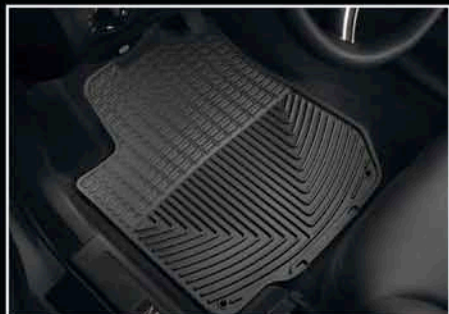


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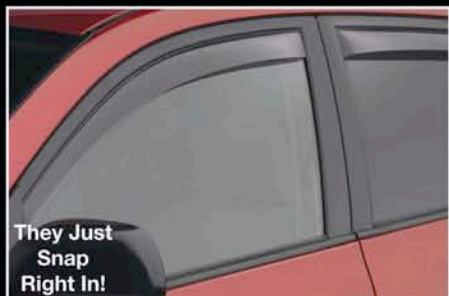
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feel as though they've gone to heaven since Italians put a high premium on the quality control of their coffee.

Whether it's a latte or espresso, it's virtually impossible to get a bad cup. A favorite coffee spot for locals and tourists alike is Caffè Sant'Eustachio in Piazza Sant'Eustachio near The Pantheon.

The stately gardens and parks that are found throughout Rome lend themselves to another option: dining al fresco. The choice is made even easier with markets scattered throughout the city that offer a mouthwatering array of fresh produce, freshly baked peasant bread, aged cheeses and cured meats, such as salami and soppressata. A favorite among the locals is Trastevere, a hip and bustling neighborhood on the western bank of the Tiber that brims with open-air markets and quaint trattorias. Once your picnic lunch is assembled, head to nearby Janiculum Hill, on



which you will find Villa Doria Pamphili, the largest public landscaped park in the city. Its centerpiece is the opulent four-story villa, also called Villa Doria Pamphili, once owned by the Pamphili dynasty. The park's sloping gardens are said to be Rome's best loca-

When in Rome

PORTA PORTESE, the famous Sunday morning swap meet located in the Trastevere neighborhood, is one of the biggest open-air markets in Europe and the perfect place to brush up on your haggling skills. Goods include anything from antique armoires, fabrics and lamps to fresh cheese and produce. You may be in for a few hours of modern bargain hunting, but the market's backdrop (a wall built in the 17th century by Pope Urban VIII to keep out invading countries) reminds you that you're definitely not in Kansas.

DINING

Da Augusto—Located on Piazza de Renzi, Trastevere, this charming trattoria offers home cooking at reasonable prices. 39 06 580 3798

Agata e Romeo—This family-run ristorante situated between the Piazza Venezia and the Capitoline Hill offers an elegant seasonal menu. agataeromeo.it. 39 06 446 6116

Please Note: Like many major cities, Rome has its share of pickpockets who prey on tourists. It's a good idea to keep close tabs on your pocketbook and wallet anywhere, but pay particular attention when using public transportation, browsing crowded open-air markets or checking e-mail at Internet cafes.



St. Peter's Square

tion for bird watching, and the shade provided by umbrella trees makes the area an ideal picnic spot. Back on the eastern side of the Tiber, the Villa Borghese gardens (situated near the Piazza di Spagna) are an oasis of quiet green, with acres of walking paths, a lake, fountains and gardens. Near the northeast corner of the park is the Galleria Borghese, one of the city's best museums.

Whether you decide to lounge beside a garden fountain, tour duomos and museums, shop till you drop, explore ancient ruins or all of the above, there is no shortage of experiences to be had in Italy's capital. But no matter what combination of sightseeing you decide upon, remember to enjoy the ride. It's unlikely you'll be able to fit all Rome has to offer into one visit, so there's no point trying. Savor the beauty of each site. Linger over a plate of pasta carbonara. Indulge in a bowl of pastel-colored gelato at an outdoor cafe. Rome isn't going anywhere.



Baltimore the Buzz

Everyone's a kid in Baltimore this holiday season

A Place to Play



A Trainload of Fun November 28 - December 30, Santa ditches the sleigh and arrives on locomotive to kick off the B&O Railroad Museum's Holiday Festival of Trains. On weekends you can ride with Santa until December 21. The festival also features fantastic displays of toy trains and model railroads.

Visit the Toy Box

Geppi's Entertainment Museum. First, toys break free in **Out of the Box**, through **December 7**, a hands-on exhibit where you can actually play with today's most popular pop-culture characters. Then Barbie rides into town with **50 Fashionable Years, December 20 - May 31, 2009**, an exhibition of Barbie's dream houses, sports cars, shifting fashions and hairstyles.



Building Memories



Connect with K'NEX Through January 4, 2009, at the Maryland Science Center. Ferris wheels, roller coasters and carousels, oh my. See an amusement park made entirely of K'NEX. Then build your own creation at the K'NEX building station.

How People Make Things

Through January 4, 2009, at Port Discovery Children's Museum. Inspired by the factory tour segments from the *Mister Rogers' Neighborhood* television series, your kids can learn how things are made by working real factory tools and machines to turn raw materials into finished products.



The Curtain Goes Up

The Grinch Who Stole Christmas - November 11 - 23 at the Hippodrome Theatre.

The Polar Express - November 15 - January 4, 2009, at the National Aquarium in Baltimore's 4D Immersion Theater.

The Rockettes - December 2 - 7 at The First Mariner Arena.

Too Hot to Handel: The Gospel Messiah - December 4 at The Meyerhoff. Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, featuring The Morgan State University Choir.

The Moscow Ballet's Great Russian Nutcracker - December 7 - 29 at the Lyric Opera House.

Celebrate

The holiday season is rich with celebrations. On December 1, the **Lighted Boat Parade** sets sail from the Inner Harbor to Fell's Point. December 4 is the annual **Lighting of the Washington Monument** in Mount Vernon. And on December 31, ring in 2009 with live bands and fireworks at the Inner Harbor's **Ports America New Year's Eve Spectacular**.

For a full list of great holiday events, deals and discounts to make your spirits even brighter, visit **Baltimore.org**



Baltimore

