



## TRAVEL

# ROME—Where “La Dolce Vita” Endures.



By Richard Levy

Once upon a time, all roads led to Rome and though their mighty empire has vanished into history, the Romans left behind a culture that includes beautiful public spaces, magnificent buildings and incomparable art. So much money flowed to Rome as tribute from conquered lands that the city became famous instead for decadence as the empire crumbled around them. In modern times, the Romans are still known for their flair for “the good life,” or as they call it, “La Dolce Vita.”

When you arrive in Rome, don't try and see or do too much during your first few days: Rome must be savored slowly, like a fine wine. On your first day take one of the “Hop On, Hop Off” buses for a quick overview to get oriented; then return to places you'd like to explore further at your own pace. There are fourteen must see historic sites and museums, but only plan to visit a few each day or you'll be overwhelmed. You'll need about four to six days to fully experience Rome unless you've already been there.

Avoid waiting in long lines for the most popular and attractions, especially at the “Coliseum” and “The Vatican”, by purchasing “The OMNIA Vatican and Rome Card” online, before you leave for approximately \$125. Just flash your card and you'll go straight “to the front of the line.” (Worth it just to watch the tourists on the long lines giving you the “fish-eye”)

My suggested Itinerary for four days of sightseeing:

**Day One:** Coliseum and The Roman Forum

**Day Two:** Fontana de Trevi, Piazza Navona, and the Parthenon

**Day Three:** The Vatican and Galleria Borghese.

**Day Four:** National Gallery of Art, the futuristic new Maxxi Museum and the Spanish Steps

If you've already been to Rome and have visited some of these places, just make up your own itinerary. I encourage you to leave time for two, or at least one, very memorable day trips. Visit “Naples and Pompeii” during a guided tour all in one long day and then take a “Florence” guided tour, also a very long day, but worth every Lira. (Ha.) Go to viator.com for details and book the tours before you go. Each Day-Trip costs about \$200 per person. (I suggest you spend a few days in Rome, followed by a Day-Trip to “Naples and Pompeii,” spend a couple of more days in Rome, then if you have the time take a Day-Trip to Florence. You can then spend your last few days in Rome.

Italian food is among the great cuisines of the world and two of the most popular Roman food specialties you must try are “Bucatini all' Amatriciana”, a hollow spaghetti in a spicy meat sauce that owes its flavor to “guanciale” or cured pork jowl, made with fresh crushed tomatoes, red pepper flakes and topped with grated pecorino cheese. The other dish is “Coda alla Vaccinara” made from ox tails stewed with tomatoes, carrots, celery, wine, seasoned with cinnamon, pancetta and other flavors; stewed for hours and finished off with raisins or pine nuts. Romans

swear by it. (In most restaurants order the “house wine”, it's what the wine the owner usually drinks at home.)

Rome's bountiful and rich history manifests itself everywhere. This magical city is a living museum. Ancient brick walls abut many modern structures; flowing fountains and historic statues with broken noses are everywhere, even on ordinary streets. (The statues were rolled when Rome was ravaged, breaking many of their ancient noses.) You're sure to be dazzled by Rome's breathtaking mélange of beautiful piazzas, huge marble monuments, impressive historic sites, fashionable shopping streets and bustling open-air markets.

My very favorite historic site is the astounding “Coliseum” constructed in 72 AD and the world's largest amphitheater, where sadistic Emperors “entertained” the masses with “Man vs. Beasts” shows that always ended in death. What caused the damage to the Coliseum? Two Earthquakes and a penny-pinching Emperor who “appropriated” a huge portion of the Coliseum's marble to build the huge doors of a new Cathedral dedicated to

him.

Stop by “Cioccolata e Vino”, one of the most unique destinations in Rome: a bookstore with a bar where drinks are served in “edible chocolate shot glasses.” Another place you must visit is the Sovereign Order of The Knights of Malta on Aventine Hill, where you can look through a keyhole that perfectly frames a beautiful view of St. Peter's Basilica: Piazza Cavalieri di Malta.

Where do I suggest you eat?” For the most unusual pizza you've ever eaten, go to “Pizza 00100” where the pizza is filled with meatballs, tripe and stuffing. In Trastevere, the old Jewish Ghetto, go to “Piperino” Restaurant, serving delicious smashed fried baby artichokes since 1876. Order them to start; better yet make it two orders: they're that good.

For an authentic but noisy lunch with “locals” go to “Trattoria Monti.” For a romantic dinner, go to “Il Bacaro” and for elegant outdoor dining try “La Veranda dell'Orso”. One night at about midnight do something very, very “La Dolce Vita- like.” Ladies, put on your sexiest dress and heels; guys – wear your blazer. Take a taxi to the “The Trevi Fountain,” where in the famous scene from the movie “La Dolce Vita”, Anita Ekberg mischievously takes off her high heels and steps into the fountain, letting the fountain's spray seductively drizzle down her face and skin tight dress, while her lover Marcello Mastroianni nonchalantly watches, cigarette dangling from his lips, jacket over his shoulders. (Don't do what “Anita” did or you'll get a 500 Euro fine.) But since you're dressed for the occasion, be sure you take some very memorable “La



*Bocca Della Verità / Italian National Tourist Board / Copyright De Agostini Picture Library*

“Dolce Vita” selfies. Before leaving toss a few coins into the fountain for good luck and rent “La Dolce Vita” before you leave NY.

One morning go “The Vatican” and if Pope Francis is on the balcony, wave hello to him. Then be prepared to be awed by the Basilica di San Pietro, the world's largest church, built over the tomb of St. Peter: a breathtaking achievement of Renaissance architecture. Plan to spend at least twenty minutes being astonished by the one of the greatest paintings ever created: Michelangelo's spectacular mural on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel.

Before entering the Vatican Museum view the famous Pieta statue. Once inside, search for a large statue of Moses dramatically holding up two tablets containing the Ten Commandments. If you look carefully, you'll be shocked to see that Moses has horns, due to a mistranslation of an ancient Hebrew text, where horns were substituted for shining or emitting rays. (Oy vey!)

As you stand inside the “Parthenon,” try to figure out how the

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*Spanish Steps / Italian National Tourist Board / Vito Arcomano*



*St. Peters from Castel Sant Angelo / Italian National Tourist Board*



*Trevi Fountain / Italian National Tourist Board / Vito Arcomano*





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gigantic dome could possibly have been built in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century. My favorite Piazza in Rome is the Piazza Navona. Surrounded by fabulous examples of Roman Baroque architecture, featuring fabulous sculptures and fountains. In the center of the grand Piazza stands the most famous, the Fontana del Quattro or Fountain of the Four Rivers created in 1651 by Gian Lorenzo Bernini and topped by the Obelisk of Domitian.

The Piazza is ringed by colorful outdoor restaurants. My favorite, “La Dolce Vita” (of course) with its lavender chair cushions and awning. Kick back for a couple of hours while you feast upon their delicious Roman appetizers and local wine as you watch the parade of very eclectic people flow by. The piazza is very festive with its jugglers, flame-eaters, acrobats, artists, street musicians and “Roman Gladiators” in armor who will pose with you in a photo for a few Euros. (Great souvenir, do something silly!) For most famous dessert in Rome go to “Tres Scalini” in the Piazza and order their Tartufo:” frozen ice cream trapped inside a hard chocolate crust.

Spend an afternoon shopping at the fashionable “Via Condotti” off the

“Spanish Steps,” “Campo de’ Fiori” or the famous “Via Veneto” where you must hang out in a Café and observe the sideshow of beautiful Italians strolling by. On Sunday morning, go to Rome’s largest Flea Market: “Porta Portese” in Trastevere, the old Jewish Ghetto. Maybe you’ll stumble upon a long-lost work of art.

The best months to visit Rome are April, May June, Sept. (Never in August when the entire country takes their vacation.) Check google.com/travel for the lowest non-stop fares for dates you’re considering. To experience an unrushed, stress-free Rome vacation including a couple of fabulous “one-day side trips” to “Naples and Pompeii” or “Florence” plan on taking 7-10 days; or 10-12 days if you can take the time and can afford it.

When booking your hotel, select one close to where everything’s happening, so as soon as you walk out of your hotel you are in the frenetic hustle and bustle of Rome. For a taste of the “La Dolce Vita” experience, stay at the very trendy “Aleph” hotel where many celebs stay (so don’t stare.) They have a lovely spa that’s included, or stay in the very romantic “Scalinata di Spanga” perched on top of “The



*Fountain at St. Peters/Italian National Tourist Board/Sandro Bessi*

Spanish Steps”. Both hotels are off the Piazza di Spagna – Rome’s best location. Or stay in the less expensive but lovely “Hotel Residenza” a quiet, small 4-star hotel and former monastery in a good location near Campo dei Fiori. If you prefer a small,

charming place stay at the “Hotel Fellini,” conveniently located near “Fontana de Trevi”.

Before you leave, pretend you’re one of the “Rome’s decadent fun-loving couples” and lose yourself in “La Dolce Vita”. Make reservations at Rome’s two most fabulous restaurants: “Agata e Romeo” and “Checchino dal 1887”. Get dressed up and let your hair down once you get there. Ask for their very finest Tuscan reds and start with any of their pastas smothered in truffles; then trust their recommendations all the way. After your amazing dinner take a taxi to the “Roof Garden Bar” at “Hotel della Minerve” for the most inspiring view in Rome overlooking the “Pantheon’s” huge glowing Dome and order a bottle of fine Champagne, after all, it is your “La Dolce Vita”.

Then take a taxi to one of Rome’s most trendy clubs, “Hulala” a designer club that attracts an elite crowd of fashion enthusiasts, artists and many celebs. The décor is modern with flashing lights and loud music. Considered one of Europe’s hot spots, the drinks are pricy and the bouncers are “very selective,” so dress chic, smile big at the door and say something in bold and disarming in Italian.

The next morning take a taxi to



*Pantheon/Italian National Tourist Board/Sandro Bessi*

the elegant “Via Conditto” shopping street (where “Sophia” shops) right off the “Spanish Steps”. And just like what Richard Gere did in the movie “Pretty Woman”, spoil your significant other with something luxurious and very Italian: exquisite Italian leather or something glittering to adorn her neck. (The much stronger dollar will ease your spontaneous purchase.) Have a leisurely lunch nearby at my favorite outdoor restaurant, “La Rampa” two blocks up from the Spanish Steps, hidden in back of a small piazza. It’s not fancy but qualifies as part of your “La Dolce Vita” experience because of it’s “Ohh my God” fabulous huge buffet of “local specialties,” one more delectable than the next. My favorites: squash blossoms stuffed with ricotta and anchovies, fried whole artichokes and vongole,” baby clams over fresh pasta,

When the time comes for you to say “Arrivederci Roma”, forget about taking the train to the airport and have your hotel reserve a taxi for you. And when you get home, try your best to keep that special Roman “La Dolce Vita” feeling going for as long as possible. Ciao.

*All photos courtesy of the Italian National Tourist Board, located at 686 Park Avenue, 3rd Floor, NY, NY 10065. ItalianTourism.com*



*Piazza Navona, Fountain of Rivers, Church St. Agnes in Agone/Italian National Tourist Board/Vito Arcomano*