

INTRODUCING ROME

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IN PICK & MIX

No other city comes close. It may no longer be *caput mundi* (capital of the world), but Rome is an epic, bubbling-over metropolis harbouring lost empires. One visit and you'll be hooked.

Rome has a glorious monumentality that it wears without reverence. Its architectural heirlooms are buzzed around by car and Vespa as if they were no more than traffic islands.

The city bombards you with images: Valentino, Bulgari, Dolce & Gabbana; elderly ladies with dyed hair the colour of autumn leaves; priests with cigars; traffic jams beneath Roman aqueducts; plateloads of pasta in shining cafés; sinuous trees beside rust-golden buildings; barrages of pastel-coloured scooters revving up at traffic lights as if preparing for a race.

People in Rome encapsulate the spirit of the city. Pass a central café and the tables outside are animated with people, downing fast shots of espresso and sporting big black sunglasses. They are neither posing nor hung over. Nuns flutter through the streets, on the trip of a lifetime or secondment from the Philippines, bustling across the road before treating themselves to an ice cream. Churches fill during Mass, and the priests, dressed in purple, cream or red silk (right down to their socks), read the rites to a hushed congregation (mostly from out of town).

Here the national preoccupation with the aesthetic fuses with incredible urban scenery to make Rome a city where you feel cool just strolling through the streets, catching the sunlight on your face outside a café, or eating a long lunch. It's a place that almost encourages you to take things easy. Don't feel like going to a museum? What's the need when it's all outside on the streets?

ROME LIFE

Hype or hyperbole? Much has been made of Rome's recent renaissance – newspapers have reported on a boom in tourism, on megaconcerts and a thriving economy. But behind the headlines, what's the reality on the ground? Has Rome really changed so much?

At the centre of the debate is Rome's mayor, Walter Veltroni. Building on the foundations laid by his predecessor, Veltroni has gone on to spearhead a cultural revival, investing in the arts and promoting a long list of events, including Rome's first-ever film festival. Tourism, a traditional barometer of city health, is flourishing, in marked contrast to the rest of the country. From a traveller's point of view, there's never been a better time to visit the Eternal City.

Yet the critics are waiting in the wings. Veltroni is accused of glossing over locals' needs in an all-out bid to pack in the visitors. Residents in the Campo de' Fiori area lament that nothing is done to quieten the drunk students who cavort round their square every night. In Trastevere, locals are finding it increasingly hard to keep up with the rents paid by rich foreigners.

Rome is not Europe's, nor indeed Italy's, most cosmopolitan city and while globalisation has made inroads, it hasn't yet 'Los Angelised' Rome, as one critic so memorably put it. Stores in the city centre might stay open all day, but head out to the suburbs at lunchtime and you'll find most shops shut and the streets subdued. The onset of contemporary design in the form of Renzo Piano's avant-garde Auditorium Parco della Musica and any number of fashionable eateries has not eclipsed the tradition of family-run trattorias and neighbourhood pizzerias.

Transport, an old Roman bugbear, is still an issue. The metro struggles to cope with a demand that is well over operating limits, while buses battle their way through streets blocked by double-parked cars. Improvements are on the cards, though. Work has started on a third metro line that will eventually connect the city's heavily populated southeastern suburbs with the centre.

The depressed state of Rome's *periferie* (outskirts) is not a new problem but it looks as though city hall is finally tackling it. In 2006 the *comune* (town council) approved a huge urban-renewal programme, covering everything from the creation of new residential hubs to the preservation of parkland. Construction has started on various projects, and although it will be years before they come to fruition, the fact that they've gone beyond the drawing board is news in itself.



The iconic Pantheon (p72) makes a great backdrop to alfresco dining on the Piazza della Rotonda

GETTING STARTED

Ever since Grand Tourists invaded in the 18th century, Rome has been a major tourist attraction. Every year millions of visitors pour into town, lured by a reputation that modern advertisers would be pushed to improve.

The city's main gateway is Leonardo da Vinci Airport (aka Fiumicino), although if you're flying with a low-cost European airline you'll probably land at Ciampino. Both are well connected with the city centre. Once in town, you'll find the centre is best explored on foot – it's not big and the streets are wonderfully vibrant.

WHEN TO GO

Rome is a busy year-round destination, although some months are busier than others. The city is at its most enticing in spring, between late March and June – the weather is good, flowers are blooming and the light is gorgeous. Early autumn (September and October) is another good time. It follows, however, that these months are the busiest of the year and prices are at their highest. Peak rates also apply at Christmas, New Year and Easter.

Visitors are traditionally warned to avoid July and August, when high temperatures make sightseeing a physical challenge. But if you can handle the heat or are prepared to adapt your daily routine, the summer can be a good time to visit. The city is less chaotic than usual, the festival season is in full swing, and prices are more manageable. Note, however, that many small businesses, including some restaurants and hotels, close for two weeks or so in August.

FESTIVALS

Summer and autumn are the best times to catch the top festivals. The Estate Romana festival, which runs from June to September, sponsors hundreds of events, many of which are staged in spectacular outdoor settings. The fun continues into autumn as the Roma-Europa festival takes over.

For more information see the Festivals & Events colour spread, [p141](#); for a list of public holidays see the Directory, [p290](#).

January

FESTA DI SANT'ANTONIO

Chiesa di Sant'Eusebio, Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II; [M](#) Vittorio Emanuele

On 17 January animal lovers take their pets to be blessed at the Chiesa di Sant'Eusebio in honour of the patron saint of animals.

February

CARNEVALE

In the week before Ash Wednesday, children take to the streets in fancy dress and throw *coriandoli* (coloured confetti) over each other.

March/April

MOSTRA DELLE AZALEE

Piazza di Spagna; [M](#) Spagna

The Spanish Steps are lined with thousands of azaleas – a perfect photo occasion.

EASTER

[M](#) Colosseo & Ottaviano-San Pietro

On Good Friday the pope leads a candle-lit procession around the Colosseum. At noon on Easter Sunday he blesses the crowds in Piazza San Pietro.

SETTIMANA DEI BENI CULTURALI

[www.beniculturali.it/settimanacultura](#) in Italian

A bonanza of free culture. Public museums and galleries open free of charge and guided tours aim to get Italians (and foreigners) back into their heritage.

NATALE DI ROMA

Piazza del Campidoglio; [G](#) Piazza Venezia

Rome celebrates its birthday on 21 April with bands on Piazza del Campidoglio and fireworks all around.

May

PRIMO MAGGIO

[www.primomagGIO.com](#) in Italian; Piazza di San Giovanni in Laterano; [M](#) San Giovanni

A free event, Rome's biggest open-air rock concert attracts huge crowds and Italian performers.

June

FESTA DI SAN GIOVANNI

[M](#) San Giovanni

The birth of St John the Baptist is commemorated on 24 June, particularly around the Basilica di San Giovanni in Laterano.

ESTATE ROMANA

[www.estateromana.comune.roma.it](#)

Between June and September, Rome's big summer festival turns the city into a giant stage. Events range from book fairs to raves and gay parties.

FESTA DEI SANTI PIETRO E PAOLO

St Peter's Basilica & Basilica di San Paolo fuori le Mura; [M](#) Ottaviano-San Pietro & San Paolo
Romans celebrate patron saints Peter and Paul on 29 June, a public holiday. Festivities are centred on St Peter's Basilica and Via Ostiense.

¡FIESTA!

[www.fiesta.it](#) in Italian; Via Appia Nuova; [G](#) Via Appia Nuova

A festival of Latin American food, music and dance on the racecourse on Via Appia Nuova. The fun lasts from mid-June to September.

July

ROMA ALTA MODA

[www.altaroma.it](#) in Italian

Catwalk models parade designer gear at locations throughout the city during Rome's biannual fashion week.

ADVANCE PLANNING

The most obvious thing you'll need to think about before booking your ticket is whether or not you need a visa. You probably won't, but if you do – see [p300](#) to find out – make sure you get onto it early. Italian bureaucracy is notoriously complex and the wheels turn very slowly.

Accommodation is something else you'd do well to sort out in advance. If you're visiting in high season (spring, early autumn, Christmas, New Year and Easter), a reservation is essential and you should try to book as early as possible. At other times, it's not absolutely necessary but is still a good idea, especially if you want your first choice of hotel.

Not many sights require you to book in advance although there is one that you'd be sorry to miss. The [Museo e Galleria Borghese](#) ([p149](#)) is one of Rome's highlights, an absolute gem that more than merits its booking.

You can reserve tickets for a number of sights on [www.pierreci.it](#) (there is a €1.50 booking fee) but unless you're worried about queues – which you'd be wise to for the [Colosseum](#) ([p58](#)) – there's usually not much point.

Similarly, unless you have your heart set on a Valentine's Day tête-à-tête or New Year's Eve dinner you shouldn't have many problems booking a restaurant once you're in town. A phone call a day or two beforehand will usually suffice.

FESTA DI NOANTRI

[% 06 516 07 969](#); [www.biosterra.com/noantri.htm](#) in Italian; Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere; [G](#) Viale di Trastevere
Trastevere's annual party takes over the neighbourhood for the last two weeks of July.

ROME PRIDE

[www.romapride.it](#) in Italian

An annual festival celebrating gay rights and culture.

August

FESTA DELLA MADONNA DELLA NEVE

Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore; [G](#) Piazza Santa Maria Maggiore

A 4th-century snowfall is celebrated at the Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore on 5 August.

FERRAGOSTO

The Festival of the Assumption, 15 August, is celebrated with almost total shutdown as the entire population heads out of town.

September

LA NOTTE BIANCA

[www.lanottebianca.it](#)

An all-night bonanza of cultural events and shopping.

ROMAEUROPA

[www.romaeuropa.net](#)

Rome's premier music and dance festival runs from late September to November.

ENZIMI

www.enzimi.com

A festival dedicated to young musicians and performance artists.

VIA DELL'ORSO CRAFT FAIRPiazza Navona; ☞ Corso Rinascimento
Artisans on and around Via dell'Orso open their studios and workshops to browsers and buyers.**October/November****CINEMA – FESTA INTERNAZIONALE DI ROMA**www.romacinemafest.org; Auditorium Parco della Musica; ☞ Viale Tiziano
Rome's film festival, aka RomeFilmFest, rolls out the red carpet for Hollywood big guns.**VIA DEI CORONARI MOSTRA-MERCATO**Piazza Navona; ☞ Corso del Rinascimento
This famous antiques street opens its doors and displays its wares.**December/January****PIAZZA NAVONA CHRISTMAS FAIR**Piazza Navona; ☞ Corso del Rinascimento
Piazza Navona is taken over by market stalls selling all manner of seasonal goodies (and rubbish).**CAPODANNO**

New Year's Eve is celebrated with open-air concerts and fireworks.

COSTS & MONEY

Rome is not Italy's most expensive city – that dubious honour usually goes to Venice – but neither is it particularly cheap. As a visitor, accommodation is going to be your biggest outlay, costing anywhere between €80 and €300 for a double room in a three-star hotel. For a high-season bed in a hostel reckon on at least €25. If you're travelling with kids, note that some hotels don't charge for toddlers who bunk up with mum and dad. Obviously, location affects hotel prices with those in the *centro storico* (historic centre) more expensive than those around Stazione Termini. Food costs also vary tremendously. A sit-down pizza with a beer might cost around €18, while a full meal at a city centre restaurant will set

HOW MUCH?

0.5L mineral water €0.50-2
 Slice of pizza €2-3.50
 Bottle of Peroni beer €1-6
 A coffee €0.70-1
 A gelato €1.50
 Taxi to/from the airport €40 (Fiumicino), €30 (Ciampino)
 1L unleaded petrol €1.30
 Ticket to the Colosseum €11
 Souvenir T-shirt from €8
 Armani jeans €200

you back at least €25 to €30. However, it's perfectly acceptable to mix and match and order, say, a starter and pasta dish, and forego the main course (*secondo*).

Museum admission varies from about €8 to €13, but many places are free to EU citizens under 18 years and over 60, with discounts generally available to students. There are various discount cards available which might or might not save you money – see p288 for more on this. Public transport is fairly cheap with a day pass costing €4. See p281 for further transport details.

INTERNET RESOURCES

Auditorium (www.auditorium.com) Get the lowdown on what's going on at the Auditorium Parco della Musica, Rome's vibrant cultural centre. Buy tickets online.

Comune di Roma (www.comune.roma.it in Italian) The official website of Rome City Council.

Enjoy Rome (www.enjoyrome.com) Useful advice from an independent tourist agency.

lonelyplanet.com (www.lonelyplanet.com) Check out the Rome destination guide and swap thoughts on the Thorn Tree forum.

Musei in Comune (www.museiincomuneroma.it) Provides information on 15 important museums, including the Capitoline Museums and the Museo dell'Ara Pacis.

Pierreci (www.pierreci.it) A bang-up-to-date site with the latest news on exhibitions, monuments and museums. This is the place to book online tickets to the Colosseum and other major sights.

Roma C'è (www.romace.it) Online version of Rome's best weekly listings guide. It's in Italian but you can download the small English section.

Rome Buddy (www.romebuddy.com) Aimed at young visitors, providing down-to-earth advice and dry humour.

Rome Tourist Board (www.romaturismo.it) Rome Tourist Board's website is not the easiest to navigate but once you get the hang of it, it's comprehensive with info on sights, accommodation, city tours, transport and much more.

Vatican (www.vatican.va) The Holy See's official site covers everything from the Vatican Museums' opening hours to Pope Benedict's latest broadside.

SUSTAINABLE ROME

A tourist destination for centuries, Rome is bearing up remarkably well. Some of the big monuments are showing signs of wear and tear but after so long in the spotlight this is to be expected. The question now is, will they last another 2000 years?

As a visitor there's not a huge amount you can do to affect the outcome but by following

a few common-sense guidelines you can minimise your trace. Without wishing to patronize these might include:

Respect barriers Most of Rome's archaeological sites are open to the public but there are areas that are off-limits. The reason is usually far from clear but if there's a barrier, bite the bullet and turn around.

Keep the camera under wraps You'd never guess from the amount of flashes going off around you but many churches and museums ban (flash) photography.

Re-use plastic bottles Fill up with water at the fountains dotted around the centre – there are two in Piazza Navona. The water is drinkable.

Get to grips with the one-way system Don't drive your car down the Spanish Steps at 4am as one drunk Colombian did in June 2007.

For more information on environmental issues, see p43.

THE AUTHORS

Duncan Garwood



Duncan has been living in Italy since 1997; in Rome since 1999. After two years in the city centre he moved out to the Alban Hills just before the 2002 introduction of the euro sent house prices through the roof. When not travelling up and down Italy for Lonely Planet, he enjoys following the madcap soap opera that is Italian politics and the equally gripping world of Serie A football. Duncan has worked on the past two editions of this book and various other Italian guides, including *Italy*, *Piedmont* and *Naples & the Amalfi Coast*.

For this guide Duncan wrote the following chapters: Highlights, Getting Started, Background, Architecture, Neighbourhoods, Festivals & Events, Sleeping, Excursions, Transport and Directory.

DUNCAN'S TOP ROME DAY

My favourite part of the city is the Jewish Ghetto and, beyond that, the green Aventino hill, so, after a leisurely cappuccino and *cornetto* (croissant), that's where I head. I enjoy wandering the dark alleyways, looking into the secondhand clothes shops and artisans' studios. Eventually I emerge onto Via del Portico d'Ottavia and, a little further south, the River Tiber. I follow the Tiber round, ignoring the tour parties waiting to put their hands in the Bocca della Verità (p69), until I see a neglected-looking path heading up the hill. I take it and after a short, steep climb I'm on top of the Aventino. There's not much to do up here but it's never crowded and I enjoy the tranquil atmosphere. Before leaving I can't resist the famous view of St Peter's dome through the keyhole of the Priorato dei Cavalieri di Malta (p115). I was once told this was the only place in Rome from where you could see three separate countries (Italy, the Vatican and the territory of the Knights of Malta), but sadly, it's not true – the UN doesn't recognise the Sovereign Order of the Knights of Malta as a sovereign state.

Back in the Ghetto I treat myself to a slap-up lunch at Da Giggetto (p193) before making my way up to the Museo dell'Ara Pacis (p85), architect Richard Meier's controversial modern museum. I enjoy Roman art and I enjoy people-watching, so afterwards I spend a lazy hour watching the city go by on Piazza del Popolo (p154). Next stop is Trastevere for an *aperitivo* (apéritif) at Freni e Frizioni (p225) and a beer or two in the teeming streets.

Abigail Hole



Several years ago, Abigail visited Rome for a month and liked it so much she stayed for three years, working on Lonely Planet's *Best of Rome, Italy* and *Puglia & Basilicata* guides. A freelance travel journalist, she nowadays divides her

time between Rome, London and Puglia, together with her Italian partner and two sons.

Abigail wrote the Shopping, Eating, Drinking & Nightlife, The Arts and Sports & Activities chapters.

PHOTOGRAPHER

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Over the last 12 years, Will has worked on assignment in over 50 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, Antarctica and the Pacific. He has produced a body of award-winning work that includes evocative images of travel, portraits and sport. He sees photography as a privilege, a rare opportunity to become intimately involved in people's lives. Will is based in Melbourne, Australia, with his wife and two children. See more at www.willsalter.com.