

## EATING

# top picks

- Agata e Romeo (p204)
- Bir & Fud (p210)
- Glass Hostaria (p210)
- L'Archangelo (p211)
- La Rosetta (p195)
- Open Colonna (p205)
- Osteria Sostegno (p195)
- Pizzeria da Baffetto (p196)
- Trattoria Monti (p204)
- Veranda de l'Hotel Columbus (pp211)

In *Un Americano a Roma* (An American in Rome; 1954), Roman actor Alberto Sordi wants to be an American. He comes home to a bowl of his mamma's pasta, but rejects it, trying instead to eat bread with milk before spitting it out. The power of pasta is too strong. Exasperated, he says, 'Maccarone, why are you looking at me? You provoke me and I shall destroy you!' A black-and-white photo of Sordi forking the spaghetti into his mouth is probably a more commonly reproduced image than that of the Sistine Chapel.

Any Roman worth their salt would surely do the same. This is a city that lives to eat, rather than eats to live. There is an obsession with the best seasonal ingredients, and markets overflow with produce fresh from the fields of Lazio. Traditional Roman cooking is rustic and deceptively simple, and like many other Italian cuisines, born of careful use of the ingredients available – making use of the cheaper cuts of meat, like *guanciale* (pig's cheek), and greens that could be gathered wild from the fields.

The city's conservatism might be measured by its menus, on which belly-warming old favourites are always top of the pots. But nowadays there are ever-increasing Michelin-starred and *cucina creativa* (creative cooking) eateries, where inventive chefs do clever things with Roman staples – adding new ingredients and cooking them in delicate, witty ways. There are also new incarnations of the *trattoria* (neighbourhood restaurant), which use the faithful formula (gingham tablecloths, old friends on the menu) but offer innovative cuisine and scholarly wine lists. Ethnic restaurants are more prevalent these days, though in Rome Italian food remains king. Even the way people eat is changing. Hip young Romans do brunch, and turn *aperitivo* (early-evening snacks and drinks) into a replacement for dinner (but don't tell their parents).

However, the old stalwart *trattoria* is still where every Roman returns, and some of the city's most memorable culinary experiences are to be had enjoying home-cooked food served by a shuffling matriarch. The favourite casual meal remains the gloriously simple pizza, with Rome's signature wafer-thin, bubbling-topped pizzas slapped down on tables by waiters on a mission.

## COOKING COURSES

Check out the **Città di Gusto** (City of Taste; [Map pp124–5](#); ☎ 06 551 12 21; [www.gamberorosso.it](#); Via Enrico Fermi 161), a six-storey shrine to food created by Italian foodie organisation **Gambero Rosso** ([www.gamberorosso.it](#)). It has cooking courses starring Rome's top chefs, a wine bar, pizza workshop, cookbook shop and the **Teatro del Vino** for demonstrations, tastings and lessons. For taste-sensation culinary events featuring the

best in local produce, there's Rome's **Slow Food movement** ([www.slowfoodroma.com](#)).

Cookery writer Diane Seed (*The Top One Hundred Pasta Sauces*) runs her **Roman Kitchen** ([Map pp74–5](#); ☎ 06 678 57 59; [www.italiangourmet.com](#)) several times a year from her kitchen in the Palazzo Doria Pamphilj. There are one-day, two-day, three-day and week-long courses costing €200 per day and €1000 per week, and a Tuesday market visit and class for €180.

For more information on courses, see [p290](#).

## DO'S & DON'TS

- Brush up when eating out; Italians dress relatively smartly at most meals.
- Bite through hanging spaghetti rather than slurping it up.
- Pasta is eaten with a fork (not fork and spoon).
- It's OK to eat pizza with your hands.
- In an Italian home you may *fare la scarpetta* (make a little shoe) with your bread and wipe plates clean of sauces.
- If invited to someone's home, traditional gifts are a tray of *dolci* (sweets) from a *pasticcERIA* (pastry shop), a bottle of wine or flowers.
- At restaurants, leave a tip: anything from 5% in a pizzeria to 10% in a more upmarket place. At least round up the bill.
- Don't be surprised to see *pane e coperto* (bread and cover charge; €1 to €5 per person) added to your bill.