



Rome & Lazio

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Best Places to Stay

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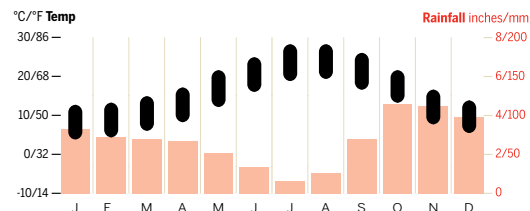
Why Go?

Ever since its glory days as an ancient superpower, Rome has been astonishing visitors. Its historic cityscape, piled high with haunting ruins and iconic monuments, is achingly beautiful, and its museums and basilicas showcase some of Europe's most celebrated masterpieces. But no list of sights and must-sees can capture the sheer elation of experiencing Rome's operatic streets and baroque piazzas, of turning a corner and stumbling across a world-famous fountain or a colourful neighbourhood market. Its streetside cafes are made for idling and elegant Renaissance *palazzi* provide the perfect backdrop for romantic alfresco dining.

But for all its appeal, Rome can be exhausting and when it starts to wear you down, change gear and head out of town. The surrounding Lazio region boasts natural beauty and cultural riches, offering everything from sandy beaches and volcanic lakes to Roman ruins, Etruscan tombs and remote hilltop monasteries.

When to Go

Rome



Apr Sunshine, Easter celebrations, Rome's birthday and azaleas on the Spanish Steps.

May–Jul Rome's festival calendar gets into full swing as summer temperatures soar.

Sep & Oct Still warm but the crowds die down and the Roma Europa festival rolls into town.

ROME

POP 2.86 MILLION

History

According to myth, Rome was founded on the Palatino (Palatine Hill) by Romulus, the twin brother of Remus. Historians proffer a more prosaic version of events, claiming that Romulus became the first king of Rome on 21 April 753 BC and the city comprised Etruscan, Latin and Sabine settlements on the Palatino, Esquilino and Quirinale hills.

Rise and Fall of the Roman Empire

The Roman Republic was founded in 509 BC after the fall of Tarquin the Proud, the last of Rome's seven Etruscan kings. From modest beginnings, it grew to become the dominant Western superpower until internal rivalries led to civil war. Julius Caesar, the last of the Republic's consuls, was assassinated in 44 BC, leaving Mark Antony and Octavian to fight for the top job. Octavian prevailed and, with the blessing of the Senate, became Augustus, the first Roman emperor.

Augustus ruled well, and the city enjoyed a period of political stability and unparalleled artistic achievement – a golden age for which the Romans yearned as they later endured the depravities of Au-

gustus' successors Tiberius, Caligula and Nero. A huge fire reduced Rome to tatters in AD 64 but the city bounced back, and by AD 100 it had a population of 1.5 million and was the undisputed *caput mundi* (capital of the world). It couldn't last, though, and when Constantine moved his power base to Byzantium in 330, Rome's glory days were numbered. In 455 it was routed by the Vandals and in 476 the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed.

The Middle Ages

By the 6th century, Rome was in a bad way and in desperate need of a leader. Into the breach stepped the Church. Christianity had been spreading since the 1st century AD thanks to the underground efforts of apostles Peter and Paul, and under Constantine it received official recognition. In the late 6th century Pope Gregory I did much to strengthen the Church's grip over the city, laying the foundations for its later role as capital of the Catholic world.

The medieval period was a dark age, marked by continuous fighting. The city was reduced to a semi-deserted battlefield as the powerful Colonna and Orsini families battled for supremacy, and the bedraggled population trembled in the face of plague, famine and flooding (the Tiber regularly broke its banks).

ROME IN...

Two Days

Start early at the **Colosseum** (p66), before moving onto the **Palatino (Palatine Hill)** (p67) and **Roman Forum** (p71). Spend the afternoon and evening in the *centro storico* (historic centre), exploring the atmospheric lanes around **Piazza Navona** (p83) and the **Pantheon** (p77). On day two, hit the **Vatican Museums** (p96) and **St Peter's Basilica** (p94). Afterwards, head over the river to check out the **Spanish Steps** (p86) and throw a coin into the **Trevi Fountain** (p87). Round the day off in the **Campo de' Fiori** (p84) area.

Four Days

Spend day three investigating **Villa Borghese** (p112) – making sure to book for the **Museo e Galleria Borghese** (p112) – and the streets around **Piazza del Popolo** (p87). End the day with dinner and drinks in **Trastevere**. Next day, marvel at classical art at the **Capitoline Museums** (p75) or the **Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme** (p105) before checking out the mighty basilicas on the **Esquilino**. See the evening out in boho **Monti**.

One Week

Venture out to **Via Appia Antica** (p115), home of the catacombs, and take a day trip, choosing between **Ostia Antica** (p148), **Tivoli** (p150) or the Etruscan treasures of **Cerveteri** (p151).