

# Understand Rome

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What's life like in Italy's Eternal City?

# Rome Today

In the past decade or so, Rome has done much to pull itself into the 21st century. A major clean-up for the year 2000 Jubilee was followed by an outbreak of artistic and architectural activity in the mid-noughties that put the city back on Europe's cultural map. Since then the pace of renovation has slowed and Rome today is a city of ups and downs, on the one hand striving to deal with economic uncertainty and political upheaval, on the other celebrating papal beatification and gay pride with festive abandon.

## Best on Film

**The Talented Mr Ripley** (1999) Murderous intrigue on Piazza di Spagna and in other Italian locations.

**Roma Città Aperta** (Rome Open City; 1945) A neorealist study of desperation in Nazi-occupied Rome.

**Dear Diary** (1994) Cult director Nanni Moretti scoots around a semi-deserted Rome.

**Rome** (2005 & 2007) TV sword-and-sandal epic covering Rome's transition from Republic to Empire.

**Roman Holiday** (1953) Gregory Peck, Audrey Hepburn, a Vespa and *dolce vita* romance.

## Best in Print

**The Secrets of Rome: Love & Death in the Eternal City** (Corrado Augias; 2007) Journalist Augias muses on little-known historical episodes.

**Imperium** (Robert Harris; 2006) Fictional biography of Cicero by bestselling Brit author.

**Michelangelo & the Pope's Ceiling** (Ross King; 2003) Fascinating account of the painting of the Sistine Chapel.

**The Borgia Bride** (Jeanne Kalogradis; 2006) Dangerous passions let loose in Renaissance Rome.

**Roman Tales** (Alberto Moravia; 1954) Short stories set in Rome's poorest neighbourhoods.

## Rome Celebrates

Despite a reputation as a chaotic and traffic-clogged city – both merited – Rome can put on a superb show when it wants to. On 1 May 2011, Piazza San Pietro provided the lordly setting for the beatification of Pope John Paul II, a ceremony that drew hundreds of thousands of pilgrims from all over the world. Then, a month later, more than 40 heads of state flew into town to join Rome's political leaders celebrate Italy's 150th anniversary. No less heartfelt were the festivities that accompanied the huge Gay Pride rally just a few days later. Up to a million people paraded through the city's streets while out on the Circo Massimo (Circus Maximus) Lady Gaga camped it up in high style.

## Scandal & Political Protest

Politics have always been central to Roman life and the recent scandals surrounding Italian Prime Minister Silvio Berlusconi have been the talk of Rome (and most of Italy) for some time. The most titillating of these, the so-called Rubygate affair, erupted in early 2011 when it emerged that Berlusconi had been hosting 'bunga bunga' sex parties at his villa near Milan. More seriously, it was alleged that he had had sex with an underage prostitute, an exotic dancer called Ruby Rubacuore. Following a criminal investigation, he was officially charged and trial proceedings began in April 2011. This took the number of trials he is currently facing to four – the other three are for business-related corruption and fraud offences.