

Welcome to Rome

History, human genius and the hot midday sun have conspired to make Rome one of the world's most seductive and thrilling cities.

Artistic Grandeur

With an artistic heritage dating back to Etruscan times, Rome is one of the world's great art cities. Throughout history, it has played a starring role in the major upheavals of Western art and the results are here for all to see – amazing classical statues, stunning Renaissance frescoes and breathtaking baroque churches. Walk around the centre and even without trying you'll come across masterpieces by the greats of the artistic pantheon – sculptures by Michelangelo, paintings by Caravaggio, frescoes by Raphael and fountains by Bernini. In Rome, art is not locked away from view, it's quite literally all around you.

Historical Legacies

For much of its history Rome has been at the centre of world events. First, as *caput mundi* (capital of the world), the fearsome hub of the Roman Empire, then for centuries as the seat of papal power. It was a city that counted and this is writ large on its historic streets – martial ruins recall ancient glories, stately *palazzi* (mansions) evoke Renaissance intrigue and towering basilicas testify to artistic genius and papal ambition. Elsewhere, underground temples, buried houses and *maddonelle* (roadside shrines) tell of past lives and local beliefs.

Roman Feasting

A trip to Rome is as much about lapping up the lifestyle as it is about gorging on art and historic sights. And there's no better way of getting into the local spirit of things than by eating and drinking well. Food and wine are central to Roman social life and the hundreds of pizzerias, trattorias, restaurants and gelaterie that crowd the city centre do as much business catering to locals as to tourists and out-of-towners. Do as the Romans do, says the proverb, and there's nothing more Roman than enjoying a tasty wood-fired pizza in a packed pizzeria or dining alfresco on a glorious city-centre piazza.

Rome, the Capital

But there's more to Rome than history, fine art and great food. Rome is Italy's capital and largest city, and while history is all around, modern life is lived to the full. Rome is Italy's political and religious heartbeat and the influences of government and Church dominate the city. Many city-centre *palazzi* house government offices, while in the Vatican the dome of St Peter's Basilica reminds everyone of the pope's presence. Political intrigue is thick in the air and as tourists tuck into their pizza politicians hatch plots over spaghetti and wine.



Why I Love Rome

By Duncan Garwood, Author

Even after more than a decade of living in Rome, the city continues to amaze me. I still get a buzz every time I see the Colosseum and I still find it thrilling to visit places I read about as a school kid. But as much as the history, what I love is the way the city embraces the present, the way designer bars occupy 15th-century *palazzi* and neighbourhood markets take over beautiful historic piazzas. I also enjoy a good meal in a Roman trattoria, especially if accompanied by a bit of political banter and a bottle of local wine.

For more about our authors, see p384.