

# Understand Rome

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# Rome Today

As Italy's political hub, Rome has been at the centre of the country's recent political and economic upheavals. A nationwide austerity drive led by technocrat PM Mario Monti caused tensions on the city's streets and protest voting in the ballot box, while spending cuts have given rise to a new trend for cultural sponsorship. Over the river in the Vatican, scandal and in-fighting culminated in the first papal resignation in 600 years.

## Best on Film

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

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

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

**To Rome with Love** (2012) Woody Allen's saccharine homage to the Eternal City.

**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.

**Rome** (Robert Hughes; 2012) A personal portrait of the city by straight-talking Australian art critic.

**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.

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

## Election Fever & Punk Politics

In 2013 election fever broke out across the city. Within the space of a few months Romans were called to vote for a new president, a new regional governor and a new mayor.

Predictably, the outcome of the general election was dramatic, if not decisive. The result was a political deadlock which dragged on for two months until Enrico Letta, a moderate from the centre-left Partito Democratico (PD; Democratic Party), was able to cobble together a cross-party coalition government. More than the result, though, the big story from the elections was the emergence of Beppe Grillo, a charismatic former comedian, as a political force. His antipolitical 5 Star Movement polled 25% of the vote, leading commentators to hail the birth of 'punk politics'.

Berlusconi's performance also stunned many. When *il Cavaliere* was booted from office in late 2011 amid political and economic chaos, everyone gave him up for dead. But he returned to the public stage in early 2013 and took almost a third of the national vote, despite a prison sentence hanging over him (in October 2012 he had been sentenced to a year for tax fraud) and standing trial for having sex with an underage prostitute.

While Berlusconi's 'bunga bunga' parties were the talk of town in 2011, in 2012 it was the turn of Lazio's right-wing regional government to provide the scandal. Reports of a masked toga party, allegedly paid for with public funds, sparked a major political furore that eventually led to the resignation of governor Renata Polverini. Taking her place was the victor of the 2013 regional election, Nicola Zingaretti, brother of a famous TV star and a member of the centre-left PD.

At the time of writing, the city has yet to vote in the mayoral elections in which incumbent Gianni Alemanno is seeking re-election.