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The history of

Civilization can be found

in one city By Greg Rienzi



Photo page 24: the Colosseum. The majestic interior of St. Peter's Cathedral at the Vatican (left); the Pantheon (below).

n Rome, the history of

L literally at your fingertips. The Italian capital, also known as the "Eternal City," retains vestiges of every period in its 2,700-year history, from ancient times to the Renaissance (A.D. 1350-1600), and the Baroque period (A.D. 1600-1750) to modern day.

civilization is quite

The city features such national treasures as the Colosseum (built in 80 A.D.), the Forum, Vatican City and the Pantheon. It also boasts some of the world's most spectacular museums, which show off works from the times of Julius Caesar, Nero and Mussolini and the hands of Raphael, Caravaggio and Michelangelo.

The city sits on the Tiber River in the Lazio region of Italy. As Roman

mythology has it, the twin brothers Romulus and Remus (sons of the god Mars and the priestess Rhea Silvia) founded the city and built it on and about seven hills: Aventine, Caelian, Capitoline, Esquiline, Palatine,

is the center of the city's municipal government, housed in several palaces that flank it, and the Temple of Jupiter. It also offers perhaps the best view of the city.

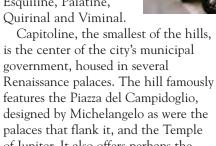
At just 580 square miles in size, Rome is not the largest of cities, so with a population of 2.8 million people the downtown area can get quite noisy and congested—major intersections can become an adventure even on foot.

Perhaps the most breathtaking

landmarks in Rome (and useful as a meeting place) are its signature squares, or piazzas. To stroll from one to the next would make a fine day's itinerary.

Piazza Navona, in the Baroque portion of the city, stands on the remains of an old church and Domitian's Stadium,

where ancient sports were held. The square features three fountains, the most famous of which is the Fountain of the Four Rivers, built by Gian Lorenzo Bernini in 1651. The fountain, designed for Pope Innocent X, boasts exquisitely carved figures arranged on a steep rocky reef that is topped by a massive pillar.







### essentials

When to go: Rome boasts a mild climate and you can visit year-round, although recent Roman summers have been dry and sweltering. Perhaps the best time to visit is early fall as the weather is still warm but very bearable. Many shops and restaurants close in August and on August 15 (The Feast of the Assumption, a national holiday) Romans en masse head for the beaches and mountains. Most locals return by September 1.

The winter months, January to March, offer a break from the crowds and give you a better chance to avoid long lines.

What to see and do: Whether you're Catholic or not, Vatican City has to rank among the top spots in Rome to see. Here you can stroll the elegantly sculpted Vatican gardens, walk across iconic St. Peter's Square, and tour St. Peter's Basilica and the Sistine Chapel, home to some of the most famous artwork in the world.

Rome is home to many magnificent fountains, perhaps the most famous is Trevi Fountain, which dominates Trevi square. The 85-foot Baroque fountain took 30 years to complete and has Neptune riding a shell-shaped chariot as its central figure. Tradition holds that if visitors throw a coin backward into the fountain they are ensured a return to Rome.

If you seek refuge from the busy streets, turn into the Villa Borghese, the largest public park in Rome. Located just north of the Spanish Steps, the 148-acre park contains wide shady paths, a manmade lake, fountains, statues and several museums.

In between checking out all the city's many architectural wonders, take in some of the many outdoor events including concerts, theater performances and outdoor films held all over town. Italians love their movies and a great place to go during the summer is the Cineporto, an open-air cinema near the Stadio Olimpico that shows both new films and Italian classics.

Where to eat and drink: When in Rome, do as the Romans do and consume much coffee, wine, pasta and gelato, just not at the same time. For coffee, go to Caffe' Sant Eustachio, a timeless and quaint café located near the Piazza Navona



where they roast their own beans and drip a lovely crema on top of the cup, if you like. Debatably, Il Gelato di San Crispino has the best gelato in town. The flavors range from the simple (lemon and hazelnut) to the more sophisticated, such as crema del Malpighi, a vinegar-based ice cream that has an aftertaste of cherry and juniper.

Almost everything in Rome goes with wine, and one of the best places to try some is the Cul de Sac, a restaurant that offers a dizzying selection of wines from around the world.

For pasta, Rome has countless world-class restaurants. To find a good deal and delicious fresh cuisine, go to Trattoria Da Oio, a few blocks from the Testaccio market, or Rivadestra Home Restaurant in the Trastevere area. The latter features Italian Mediterranean cuisine lovingly paired with some of the country's best wines.

Where to stay: The hotels in Rome can get very expensive—think New York City or London prices—but there are still affordable options. The Hotel Rosetta, in the Monti neighborhood, is a good bet and it's conveniently located near the Colosseum, the Roman Forum and other main attractions. If you crave style and luxury, stay at the Albergo Cesari, located right near the Pantheon and in the heart of Old Rome. There are many shops, restaurants and landmarks nearby and the service consistently gets top marks.

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A 75-foot obelisk marks Rome's largest square, the Piazza del Popolo (left).

## Tips from a local

Brian Wingfield first visited Rome when he studied abroad as a graduate student. His studies took him to Bologna, but he often found time for day trips into Rome.

He loved the area so much that he stayed for a time after graduation. As a contributing writer for *The New York Times*, Wingfield also stayed in Rome for six months in 2005-2006.

He says he loves to walk the city's streets and along the Tiber River, especially during an early fall afternoon, but one of his favorite stops takes him well above street level, to the observation deck on the Capitoline Hill.

"I love to go there late or early evening, just to hang out and take in the city. The view is incredible." Wingfield says. "Sometimes you can have the whole place to yourself."

Another favorite destination of his is the Vatican.

"There are things there you just can't see anywhere else in the world," he sys. "Plus, the pomp and ceremony is like nothing else, it's just so grandiose."

He recommends that visitors seek out the Campo de Fiori quarter and stroll through its famous openair market to people watch and to buy fresh flowers and tasty fare.

While there is plenty to see and do in Rome, Wingfield says you should save some time for a day trip to Tivoli, a historic hill town in the Lazio region. Tivoli's two most famous tourist attractions are the magnificent gardens and fountains of the Villa d'Este and the extensive ruins of Hadrian's Villa, known as the Villa Adriana.

What is particularly wonderful about Rome, Wingfield says, is its timelessness. He marvels at how history oozes out of every corner of the city and says you can't help but be transported back in time when you visit such spots as the Pantheon or the Colosseum, both great reminders of the Roman Empire.

"Locals will even tell you that Rome never changes. If you visited there 50 years ago, it would not be tremendously different than it is today," he says. "For the Italians, preservation is really important." In the center of Rome lies the Piazza di Spagna. It's located at the foot of the Spanish Steps, three flights that lead to the church Trinita dei Monti. The steps are decorated each April and May with a dazzling array of potted azaleas and the square itself, which is somewhat butterfly shaped, is a magnet for tourists.

The largest of the squares is the Piazza del Popolo (of the people), which is in truth an oval, not a square. A 75-foot obelisk, put there to commemorate the conquest of Egypt, stands in the center of the traffic-free piazza, which is surrounded by magnificent neoclassical architecture, cafes and restaurants. This piazza is also the site of the city's northern gate, the Porta del Popolo.

To get from one piazza to another, the recommended modes of transportation are foot, bus or motor scooter, the quintessential way to see Rome. The city does have a metro, but its stops are few, and taxis there are pricey.

In fact, Rome can get very expensive, perhaps no more so than in the Via Veneto district. In addition to many upscale hotels and shops, the area is home to Harry's Bar, an elegant restaurant and piano bar immortalized in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita* and a haven for celebrities.

In need of a sports fix? Football (soccer) is Rome's main attraction. Both SS Lazio and AS Roma, two top division teams, play their home matches at the Stadio Olimpico, located to the north of the city's center. The football season lasts from September to May and most matches take place on Sunday afternoons.

The heart of Rome might just be Trastevere, an area on the left bank of the Tiber River. This bohemian neighborhood is marked with winding streets, terra-cotta buildings, oneof-a-kind boutiques, and coffee bars and restaurants aplenty.

If you want to go off the beaten path and taste traditional Roman fare, head to Testaccio, a traditional working-class area named after the mountain of discarded amphoras (jars) called Monte Testaccio. The area has a lively market area where you can sample such traditional pleasures as pizza, bacalao (dried and salted cod) and sweetbreads. This up-and-coming part of town also recently sprouted many nightclubs.

Renzo Bragantini, a professor of literature at the University of Roma La Sapienza, says that the city, which has been his home for more than 30 years, still inspires and awes him.

"It's just so beautiful: the colors, the monumental palaces. It's a wonderful place, especially if you like Renaissance and Baroque architecture," Bragantini says. "I think it's one of the most attractive and unique places in the whole world."





The Tiber River, left, flows through Rome and is the third largest river in Italy.



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