

## 10 things to do in...Rome

### Giovanna Dunmall lists what you shouldn't miss when in Rome - and not necessarily in this order!

You've visited the Spanish steps, Trevi fountain, Piazza Navona, the Roman Forum and the Coliseum. What next? Rome's heady mix of architecture, ranging from the ancient Roman to the present day, of culture and brashness, of delicately coloured palazzi and intoxicating traffic should provide entertainment enough. This is a city where the most ordinary of pastimes, or a spectacular view, can become unforgettable or charmed events. Here are ten simple ways to get under contemporary Rome's skin.

#### 1. CHURCHES

With over four hundred Catholic churches in Rome, a beautiful one is always close at hand. You don't have to be religious to have a spiritual experience; visit them for their mesmerising art, architecture and atmosphere. Three not to miss are: Santa Maria della Vittoria (Via XX Settembre 17) for Bernini's Coronaro Chapel featuring a Saint Teresa whose ecstasy at her vision of divine love is hard to accept as piety alone; Sant'Ignazio di Loyola (Piazza Sant'Ignazio) for its trompe l'oeil cupola (or dome) whose two-dimensionality will only become evident once you are underneath it; Sant'Andrea della Valle for its authentic dome (the biggest in Rome after St Peter's), and its claim to fame as the setting for Act I of Puccini's Tosca (Palazzo Farnese and Castel Sant'Angelo, above, are the locations for Acts II and III).

#### 2. HIGH-TECH CULTURAL VENUE

Visit the long-awaited and finally inaugurated state-of-the-art Auditorium, or Parco della Musica (Via de Coubertin 15), designed by Renzo Piano and located in the north of the city. You can attend concerts or other events in one of three halls with perfect acoustics. Its futuristic look (the halls resemble flying saucers), and on-site Roman ruins, will impress even the most world-weary traveller. Take tram no. 2 from Piazzale Flaminio above Piazza del Popolo.

#### 3. COFFEE OBSESSION

Romans wouldn't dream of doing without their morning jolt of espresso, or a creamy cappuccino. And with good reason. Both the well-known coffee-houses (Tazza d'Oro, Via degli Orfani 84, just off the Pantheon), and the most unlikely hole-in-the-wall bars (Caffè Perù, Via Giulia 84), serve some of the frothiest, tastiest coffee you are ever likely to drink. It's usually consumed al banco (standing up at the bar), but don't let that put you off. You can take all the time you want.

#### 4. HISTORY, ART AND RELIGION

The Mercati di Traiano (Trajan's markets) are a remarkably well-preserved Roman equivalent of a shopping centre boasting six storeys which at the time contained over 150 shops. At night they are beautifully lit. The Vatican museums (left) are the largest museum complex (1,400 rooms) in the world, and belong to the world's smallest country. For a slightly more macabre dose of history, the crypt attached to the Church of the Immaculate Conception (Via Veneto 27) offers five subterranean chapels imaginatively (and prettily!) decorated with the bones and skulls of over 4,000 Capuchin monks. A notice reads: What we are now you will be. Food for thought...

#### 5. CAMPO DE' FIORI

Head for Campo de' Fiori at any time of day. One of the only piazzas in Rome without a church, in the morning it hosts the city's historic and most picturesque market, in the evening it metamorphoses into a popular see-and-be-seen nightspot. The best time to go is at aperitivo hour, around 7pm, before the bars fill up. In summer many people don't bother with its expensive wineries and cafés and just stand in the square and talk. If affordable alcohol is what you are after, however, try the Antica Vinéria (Via Monte della Farina 38), a no-frills

stand-up wine bar that's a five-minute walk away and serves good but cheap wine. No mean feat in the city centre.

## **6. SHOPPING AND MARKETS**

The Via Condotti area is famous for designer shopping at its most stylish (Prada, Versace, Gucci...), but Via del Governo Vecchio and Via dei Giubbonari are where to head for innovative local designers and secondhand fashion. MAS (Via dello Statuto 11), just off Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, was the first department store to open in Rome back in 1882. Definitely a case of faded glory, it nevertheless offers 8,000 square metres mind- bogglingly crammed with bargain-hunter bounty: marked-down brand clothing and shoes for men, women and children. Despite the advent of supermarkets, Rome's over 250 daily (except Sunday) mercati rionali (neighbourhood markets) are still going strong. The most traditional and colourful are the open- air ones, such as those held in Campo de' Fiori, Piazza Testaccio in Testaccio, and Piazza San Cosimato in Trastevere. The most interesting is the huge but covered Nuovo Mercato Esquilino (main entrance on Via Filippo Turati between Via Mamiani and Via G. Pepe), where the produce on sale is strongly influenced by the various ethnic groups (principally Bangladeshis, Chinese and North Africans) that have settled in the Esquiline area.

## **7. CLUBBING BELOW THE MOUNT OF SHARDS**

The most lively area for nightclubs is the city's working- class Testaccio district, around the Monte dei Cocci (mount of shards), an artificial hill made from discarded bits of amphorae used to store oil and wine in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The winding Via di Monte Testaccio, an uninhabited and almost rural lane by day, plays host to an endless array of clubs, bars, restaurants and live music venues by night, and caters to gays, salsa-lovers and ravers alike.

## **8 VIEWS (ROMANTIC AND OTHERWISE)**

Walk (or take bus no. 870) up to the Gianicolo hill before sunset for some of the most romantic views over Rome, a welcome relief from the chaos below. Since the year 2000 the dazzlingly bombastic white-marble monolith in Piazza Venezia, known as the Vittoriano (built to honour the first king of united Italy, Vittorio Emanuele), is open to visitors. It's the only place in town from which the spectacular view is free of the overwhelming monument itself! Or else for a breathtaking view, accompanied by sumptuous food, head for La Pergola restaurant atop Rome's Cavalieri Hilton Hotel (Via Cadlolo 101, Tel: 06 35091). Despite steep prices and an out-of-the-way location, head chef Heinz Beck has transformed the venue into gourmet heaven with an incredible view.

## **9. GELATO**

Savour the most mouthwatering gelato (ice cream) in the world at Il Gelato di San Crispino (Via della Panetteria 42, close to the Trevi fountain). Additive- and colouring-free, it is made using seasonal ingredients only and served in paper cups (cones would contaminate its purity). The pistachio is not fluorescent but pastel green, the zabaione is made with 20- year-old oak barrel- matured marsala, the cinnamon and ginger is out of this world.

## **10. AND WHEN IN ROME...**

Hire a scooter (Roma Scooter Rent, Via in Lucina 13-14, just off Via del Corso near the Parliament) and thread skilfully (read recklessly) in and out of congested traffic, especially late at night. You will soon understand why Romans are addicted to their two- wheelers. Cool down at one of the city's classic and much-photographed fontanelle (water-fountains), which you will find on many of the historic centre's streets. Attend a football match. Home matches of the two local top-division teams (A.S. Roma and S.S. Lazio) are played on Sundays at the 85,000-seat Stadio Olimpico, host to the 1990 World Cup Final, and arouse fiercely passionate behaviour amongst most Romans. (Buy your tickets from Pride Italian Football, Vicolo del Gallinaccio 7, near the Trevi Fountain.) Cross Piazza Venezia on foot (but at your own peril, above). One of the city's busiest and most confusing crossroads, it has no pedestrian traffic lights, only zebra crossings! Don't mind the tourists balefully standing at the piazza's ends for minutes on end. Keeping an eye on oncoming cars and scooters, cross the street with determination and a firm expression on your face. That's what the locals do. RH

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