



## When in Rome

While its signature flourishes are as seductive as ever – zippy Vespas, boisterous bar-counter chatter, trattoria meals and Tiber River sunsets – there are unexpected charms to discover in the Eternal City.

STORY BY MARY GRAY



## See ruins from a new perspective

For travellers bussing into the heart of Rome from Termini station or locals changing lines on their daily commutes, the Largo di Torre Argentina archaeological area (left) once seemed like little more than a transport hub. The below-ground ruins of four Roman temples and a theatre were so overshadowed by public transit commotion that the ancient past simply faded further into the background. The star of the show is none other than the Theatre of Pompey – where Julius Caesar was assassinated – though the ruins were blocked by medieval buildings until the 1920s, when Mussolini went on a bulldozing blitz of congested areas. Happily, 2023 brought Largo di Torre Argentina’s biggest development in nearly a century: platforms were installed to make the area walkable (and wheelchair accessible), allowing visitors to engage with the space in ways unimaginable from above ground.

Further incentive to explore the ancient world: each Sunday, a new high-speed direct train now connects Rome to the archaeological park of Pompeii, near Naples, taking less than two hours each way. Despite the crystallised city’s popularity, the route previously involved train switches, slower speeds and travel on a famously erratic Neapolitan rail network. Now, after sipping your morning coffee in the shadow of St Peter’s – knocking back a macchiato at the elegant Sciascia Caffè (sciasciacaffe1919.it) in Prati, standing at the bar and mixing with the well-heeled local crowd – you can pop down to see Pompeii in comfort and be back in Rome in time to eat amatriciana for dinner.

Gabriella Clare Marino. Stevin

## Sample classics from a chef’s chef

At the end of the tram line 8 from Piazza Venezia is Da Cesare al Casaletto (bottom; trattoriadacesare.it). The Portuense neighbourhood trattoria is the gold standard for Roman classics such as pasta alla gricia (pecorino romano, black pepper and guanciale) or coda alla vaccinara (braised oxtail), best enjoyed with a little fritti (fried bites) to get things going. Suppli (Roman-style fried rice balls) aren’t the most adventurous choice but if you’re going to stick with the city’s culinary failsafes, there’s no better place to do that than here.

Da Cesare al Pellegrino – the restaurant’s sleek new outpost not far from Campo de’ Fiori in the heart of the city – brings the tradition and care of the original to a fresh audience. The space opened last spring to replace the beloved Settimio, an old-school, white-tableclothed titan of the scene whose owners, Mario and Teresa Zazza, had aged out of the restaurant business. Real “Romans’ Romans” (Mario is known to have rubbed elbows with Italian cinema legend Alberto Sordi), the duo entrusted the space to Da Cesare’s Leonardo Vignoli (below, with his wife, Maria Pia Cicconi), hailed by many as the best in the game. Locals just count their lucky stars that the Zazzas’ life’s work wasn’t converted to a multinational franchise.





## Retreat from the Roman symphony



The city's luxury hospitality star is on the rise, with new high-end properties appearing seemingly every month. Rosewood Rome ([rosewoodhotels.com](https://www.rosewoodhotels.com)) will be the big new kid on the block for 2025 when it joins a host of exciting recent entries, including InterContinental Rome Ambasciatori Palace ([qantas.com/hotels/intercontinentalrome](https://www.qantas.com/hotels/intercontinentalrome)) on Via Veneto, made famous in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*.

Tucked on a side street near Via Veneto and Piazza Barberini is the current talk of the town, The Rome Edition (below; [qantas.com/hotels/romeedition](https://www.qantas.com/hotels/romeedition)), a sleek new feather in Marriott's cap. Housed in a Rationalist building designed by Marcello Piacentini in the 1940s, the hotel's pared-down aesthetic offers respite from

the cacophony and drama that make Rome, well, Rome. And where many luxury properties fail to get jet-setting guests and local residents mingling, The Rome Edition has cracked that code with its rooftop bar and chic Italian-Mediterranean restaurant, Anima, which serves regional fare from its open kitchen.

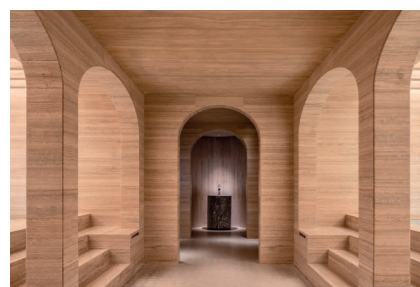
For the opposite of pared-down, head to Bulgari Hotel Roma (above; [qantas.com/hotels/bulgariroma](https://www.qantas.com/hotels/bulgariroma)), the crown jewel of the luxury scene. There's the iconic local jewellery brand at the helm, the renowned chef Niko Romito on food and the views of the Mausoleum of Augustus reminding you exactly where you are. Book one of the coveted spots at La Terrazza, the sleek rooftop bar and the best place in town for doing what the Romans do best: seeing and being seen.

## Scale Rome's eighth hill

Spoiler: there are more than seven hills in the City of Seven Hills. Being outside the ancient walls of the old city, west of the Tiber River in the Trastevere neighbourhood, the Gianicolo (above) is not included in

the official count, though it's Rome's second largest hill. The prettiest route to take is from Ponte Sisto in Trastevere, weaving your way towards Via Garibaldi and being sure to stop off at the Fontana dell'Acqua Paola, locally nicknamed Il Fontanone (the Big Fountain). From there it's a five-minute straight shot to the hill's main terrace, beloved for its community vibes and panoramic

views. While the hill has borne witness to key historical events, from the reign of Nero to the Risorgimento, most climbers aren't there for the historical clout. Kids will love the open-air Teatrino di Pulcinella Gianicolo, a traditional puppet theatre that has been putting on shows here since 1959 and runs 15-minute sessions every day of the week, except Wednesdays and in the case of rain.



### Bathe like a god, only better

Since opening last March, Six Senses Rome ([qantas.com/hotels/sixsensesrome](https://www.qantas.com/hotels/sixsensesrome)) has quickly become the city's most buzzed-about self-care spot since the Baths of Diocletian. The eternal healing power of water is woven into the building, not just the treatments (witness a 1700-year-old baptismal font on the ground floor). And no expense was spared in the decadent spa: expect a lavish recreation of ancient Roman bathing rituals, with an hour-long caldarium-*tepidarium*-*frigidarium* experience, a circuit designed to reduce inflammation by warming your body up, tapering back to resting temperature then cooling you down. So what if you're not Venus (or Mars, for that matter)? Treat yourself like an off-duty ancient deity.

Peter Schickert. John Athimaris

Nikolas Koenig. Francesco Luciani





## Soak up neighbourhood life

If Rome feels more like a collection of mini villages than a monolithic city, Testaccio – named for a hill in the area fashioned from broken pieces of ancient pottery – is one of its most distinct. Though it’s home to the Pyramid of Cestius (above) and to Rome’s Non-Catholic Cemetery (burial site of Keats and Shelley, among others), Testaccio is most beloved for its edgy blue-collar spirit and offal-based cuisine. If you’re less, ahem, gutsy, the stewed tomato and cheap-cut boiled beef in picchiapò is delicious; try it at Mordi e Vai in Testaccio Market ([mercatoditestaccio.it](http://mercatoditestaccio.it)). The neighbourhood’s gritty energy is most evident in the cultural scene: rather than Caravaggio paintings or Baroque churches, picture heady exhibitions at venues such as the slaughterhouse-turned-contemporary-art-hub Mattatoio ([mattatoioroma.it](http://mattatoioroma.it)) or Villaggio Globale (@villaggioglobaleroma), the social-justice-minded cultural centre run by a collective of artisans and fashion designers.



### Cook with the city’s savviest locals

If a taste of “authentic Rome” is what you’re after, you won’t find it on TikTok. Look instead to the city’s remarkably cosmopolitan community of cooks, authors and author-cooks, many of whom are now teaming up and offering experiences for small groups keen on all things *cucina romana*. One trio in particular stands out: cookbook author and *Guardian* food columnist Rachel Roddy, Italian pickler-baker-cookery-teacher Carla Tomasi (known as Rome’s “vegetable whisperer”) and food stylist and producer Alice Adams Carosi. This creative cohort offers Market to Table ([aliceadams-carosi.com](http://aliceadams-carosi.com)) outings that kick off with a visit to the San Giovanni di Dio or Testaccio market before hauling the bounty back for meal prep at Latteria Studio, Adams Carosi’s sunlight-drenched dream kitchen in the heart of Monteverde Nuovo. ↘