

# Condé Nast Traveller

FAMILY GUIDE:  
THE BEST OF ROME

MARCH 2015 £4.10

OUR FAVOURITE HOTELS

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## CHILDREN IN THE CITY

## ROME

The Eternal City is a colossal adventure playground for kids, with armoured gladiators and bone-strewn catacombs to fire their imagination, and pizzas and ice cream for fuel. By Emily Mullan

## BEST ATTITUDE

Even if everything about the city seems to be chaotic, try to keep your cool. The Romans still dream of ruling the world, and every taxi driver thinks he is Julius Caesar. Nothing you can do will make them change their minds. The key to enjoying Rome is to relax and not to end up with terminal cultural indigestion. Don't underestimate your children. If exploration of the weightier sites is kept quick and snappy, they can manage and absorb much more than you realise. Be selective: whether your preference is for Emperors or Popes, you could spend a lifetime getting to grips with Rome's history – don't try to do it all.

## MINI CULTURE VULTURES

A good place to start is by taking the glass lift to the top of the **Vittoriano Monument**, otherwise known as the Wedding Cake. The view is unrivalled and the impeccably dressed military guard will blow whistles at unruly children. Also remember that little ones like anything to do with death. A trip to the **Catacombs**, which are always blissfully cool in the heat of a Roman summer, or to the **Crypt of Santa Maria della Concezione**, with its bizarre decorations made from the bones of 4,000 monks, will capture the attention of even the most uninterested child.

## ART ATTACK

The one piece of art to wake children up is the magnificent trompe-l'oeil dome inside **Sant' Ignazio di Loyola**, painted by the great fresco artist Andrea Pozzo when the church didn't have the funds to pay for an actual dome. If children stand on the marble disc in the centre of the nave, it's almost impossible for them to tell that the ceiling is actually flat.

## BEST GUIDE

**John Fort** ([www.johnfort.com](http://www.johnfort.com)) has guided in Rome for decades and is excellent at bringing the ancient city to life. Expertise in Greek and Roman



myths and legends combined with a passion for ice cream (his favourite flavour is Sardinian wild honey, from **Il Gelato di San Crispino**) makes him the ideal guide for small people.

## BEST SWEET TREAT

A cobblestone's throw from Sant' Ignazio is the legendary **Giolitti** ice-cream parlour. Waiters in white jackets with stiff gold brocade deal swiftly with the hungry hordes who flock to the finest purveyor of *gelati* in the Eternal City, if not the whole of Italy. The flavours on offer change with the seasons, but to be the envy of all indulge in a *coppa giolitti*, a sundae comprising chocolate ice cream, custard, zabaione and cream, topped with shavings of hazelnut.

## AN IDEAL AFTERNOON

The **Villa Borghese gardens** sprawl across 148 acres and encompass merry-go-rounds, trees that are just asking to be climbed, a small zoo and a boating lake. It even boasts the enchanting **Cinema dei Piccoli**, Rome's only cinema exclusively for children, which also has an excellent café next door. At the weekend, the paved roads throng with cyclists, roller-skaters and electric golf buggies, which can be hired at the entrance at Viale Trinità dei Monti. Unlike most cars, golf buggies have unlimited access to the entire historical centre, saving tired little legs from exhaustion as they whizz past layers of Roman history, from ancient basilicas to the baroque fountains in Piazza Navona and the contemporary glass box shrouding the ornate **Ara Pacis** altar. ➤



## THE EXPERTS... FAMILY



### BEST ESCAPE

To really get to grips with how the Ancient World lived on a daily basis head for the archaeological site of **Ostia Antica**, which served as Rome's seaport, and is a quick train ride away. Picnic in the shade of an umbrella pine and let the children run free among the ruins.

### BEST INSIDER SECRET

Recently opened by a member of the renowned Antinori wine dynasty, **Fattoria di Fiorano** is a beautiful working farm and vineyard just a short drive from the city centre along the ancient Appian Way. As well as having a superb restaurant and children's menu (about £12, open Friday to Sunday only), the farm offers regular cooking classes and experiences for children. Pizza-making, for example, involves collecting ingredients from around the farm, including wheat, tomatoes, basil and eggs, before getting hands mucky rolling out the dough. For parents, a tasting of the organic wines in the cellar can be arranged.

### DRESSING-UP GAMES

Closer to Rome at the start of the Appian Way is the immensely popular **Gladiator School**, where wannabe Russell Crowes aged seven and over can learn the art of gladiatorial combat. Each session lasts just over two hours, and includes a tour of the Museum of the Roman Invincible Army. Participants wear special tunics and are awarded certificates to pin on their bedroom walls. Alternatively, head for the **Cinecittà World** theme park, which opened last summer. Roller-coasters and bumper cars aside, the biggest thrill is in donning togas to re-enact famous scenes from the epic films *Ben Hur* and *Cleopatra* on the original sets.

### MONSTER MUNCHERS' BRUNCH

If you're not lucky enough to be staying at **JK Place Roma**, the boutique hotel offers a weekend brunch. The menu is superb: bread comes from Rome's finest traditional baker, Roscioli, cheeses from Lazio, and pasta, including a sublime *cacio e pepe*, is made to order. What's more, children under 10 years old go for free.

### PIZZA

Children love street food, and Rome has some of the best in Italy. You'll find pizza *al taglio* – by the slice – more or less everywhere, but connoisseurs head for the staggeringly tasty offerings at **Pizzarium**, near the Vatican. And at **Antico Forno Roscioli**, which you'll find by the Campo de' Fiori vegetable market, the *pizza rossa* is possibly even better than its awesome bread.

### PIZZA-MAKING INVOLVES COLLECTING INGREDIENTS FROM AROUND THE FARM, INCLUDING WHEAT, TOMATOES AND EGGS

### LUNCH

'**Gusto Osteria** has exposed brickwork and marble counters that groan under antipasti during aperitivo hour. It's near Piazza Augusto Imperatore, where Mini Coopers raced through the columns in *The Italian Job*, making it a must for young and old. For a taste of old-fashioned Rome, join the legions of local families who have been flocking for centuries to **La Campana**. Purporting to be Rome's oldest restaurant, dating back to the 16th century, the emphasis here is on traditional Roman dishes such as *carciofi*



*alla giudia* (fried artichokes) and *coda alla vaccinara* (oxtail stew), which both feature on the daily menu.

### SUPPER

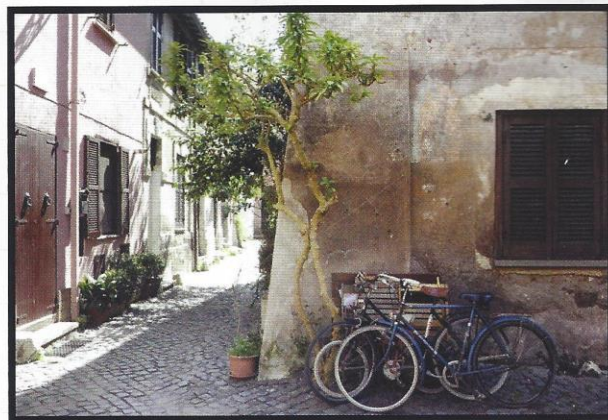
**Enoteca Corsi**, tucked down a small alley behind the **Pantheon**, feels like a real discovery. The wine shop next door closes at 1pm to allow for trestle tables to be set up between the bottles and crates. The lively atmosphere makes it great fun, and

the food is simple but good, with a choice of three dishes for each course. Open for dinner on Thursdays and Fridays only.

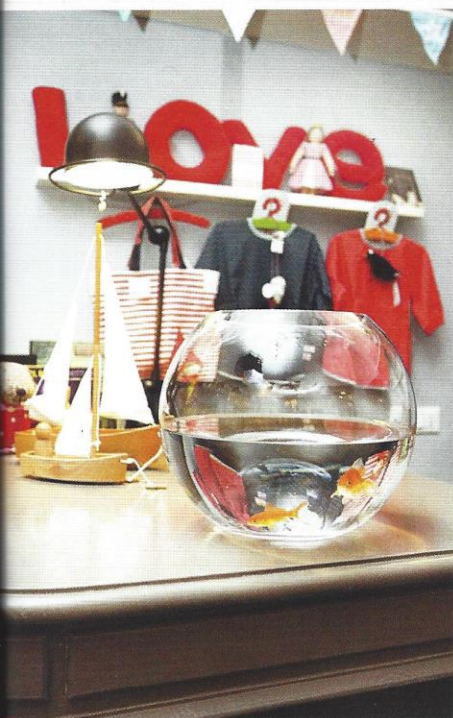
### PIT STOP

The **Museo Canova Tadolini** is packed with plaster casts of sculptures by Antonio Canova and Adamo Tadolini, giving it the feel of a sculptor's studio as it would have been in the time of the Grand Tourists. Sculptures are also scattered around the coffee shop and restaurant upstairs, making it the perfect spot to combine a dash of culture with a shot of espresso.





*Clockwise from far left:*  
Villa Nocetta; Il Pesciolino  
Rosso toy shop; Hotel  
de Russie, by Piazza del  
Popolo; Ostia Antica, ideal  
for a picnic outing; the Ara  
Pacis; Il Pesciolino Rosso



## WONDERFUL SHOPS

Fathers and sons will enjoy the **Ferrari Store** on via Tomacelli, where they can have their photo taken next to Formula 1 cars. A few minutes' walk away, there is the choice of **LittleBigTown**, Italy's largest toy store, or the tiny **Pesciolino Rosso**, near the Spanish Steps, which sells enchanting hand-carved models of Pinocchio.

## COOL DOWN

It is beyond helpful to know that the **Rome Cavalieri Hotel**, which has three swimming pools, allows non-residents to escape the baking city. Come any time, or plan ahead

for the weekend brunch, when kids can also enjoy face-painting, bouncy castles, an ice-cream bar and pizza-making classes. At about £28 per child, it's not cheap but, *mamma mia*, there are also on-site nannies, so parents can really kick back too.

## WHERE TO STAY

**Hotel de Russie** (doubles from about £365) is still the number-one address in Rome. The pared-down design is fresh and sophisticated, the light-filled suites are gigantic and the location by Piazza del Popolo is exactly where you want to be. Best of all are the spectacular gardens – a magical escape for children needing to let off steam. The hotel's recently launched Teen programme inspires even the most sullen adolescents to discover the city through sport, fashion and movies. The fact that they are shown around by the

prettiest guides in town also helps. **Casa Howard** (doubles from about £50) is the city's secret pied-à-terre, hidden down a side street near the Spanish Steps. There are five differently styled bedrooms: the Chinese Room, for example, is swathed in glamorous silks, while the White Room is a fresh mix of Toile de Jouy and delicate antique furnishings. OK, so you have to walk down a corridor to get to the bathroom, but kimonos and slippers are provided. If you insist on visiting in July and August, **Villa Nocetta** (from £6,500 for two nights), with its large swimming pool and jasmine-scented gardens, is great. This is a real retreat and sleeps 10 comfortably. Nicholas the driver will drop you wherever you want to go. There's also a cook and a lovely butler, Tiziana, who can arrange for a gladiator to come to the villa for one-on-one lessons.