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How to spend it

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THE SMOOTH GUIDE THE LONG LUXURIOUS WEEKEND



rome

From cuisine to culture, handbags to hotels, the Eternal City's appeal is sharpened of late with fresh interpretations of its timeless attractions, says Maria Shollenbarger

Omnes viae Romam ducunt, the saying goes: all roads lead to Rome. Medieval scholars purportedly coined it to explain how diverging paths of inquiry would lead to a single conclusion, but ancient history more than backs up the literal statement. (Well, sort of; at the height of the Empire, all major roads in fact radiated out from Rome, to its various vanquished territories.) Cut to 2014, and the *urbs caput mundi* is a happily chaotic jumble of high culture and gritty street life, sacred beauty and canny commerce.

As everywhere, hip neighbourhoods come and go here; outlying areas draw the spotlight, only to inevitably lose it to the endlessly alluring *centro storico*. Its twisting, narrow streets are replete with felicitous collisions of light, space and colour, against a backdrop of architectural splendour: ancient ruins, medieval towers and classical Renaissance proportions that have accreted to combine, accidentally and magnificently, as nowhere else in the country – or the world. The *centro storico* was, and is, Rome's eternal cultural crossroads, the place where today the *borghese* matron

with the aquiline profile and the Fendi bag over her arm, inured to the tourist masses, weaves a nimble route through Chinese tour groups and backpack-laden students, trailing ineffable elegance behind her, like smoke eddies from a jewelled censer.

And for all its saturation, the historic centre remains thriving, a bit brash, utterly *bella figura*-obsessed: in short, very Roman. It's here, on a ruler-straight street connecting two crookedly pretty squares, that Florentine hotelier and publishing entrepreneur Ori Kafri has opened his third JK Place hotel, a 30-room boutique showcase in a former school. From the flawlessly appointed library to the striped-marble bathrooms to the walls hung with large-format photographs by Massimo Listri (a signature of designer Michele Bonan, who also masterminded the decor at JK Place Roma's sister properties in Florence and on Capri), it sets a splendid



Above: the Castel and Ponte Sant'Angelo, which stand on the Tiber. Left: JK Cafe at JK Place Roma

their ingeniously fitted oak kitchenettes stocked with treats from Moriondo & Gariglio, and the 360° views from the knockout roof terrace (complete with fireplace) – along with an unassailably able staff, armed with a roster of top restaurants and attractions on speed dial – keep it close to fully booked year round.

Of Rome's *grandes dames* hotels, Rocco Forte's Hotel de Russie has the corner on glamour, its Stravinskij Bar and garden a reliable locus of scene-making and air-kissing for luminaries of media and film. Rooms are understated and neutral in tone; the corner suites and those with a garden view possess a bit more character. The St Regis Rome, located above the *centro storico* fray between the Quirinal and the Baths of Diocletian, diffuses the 19th-century grandeur of its façade and

new bar for contemporary house-hotel style in the heart of the ancient city.

JK Place Roma is arguably only the city's second five-star boutique hotel, a niche hitherto owned by another Florentine family. Its scion, Leonardo Ferragamo, president of the Lungarno Collection, opened the 14-suite, ultra-discreet Portrait Roma above the Ferragamo flagship on the Via Condotti in 2007. Portrait Roma has no lobby, no restaurant; but the elegant rooms, with

public spaces with sleek, contemporary decor in many of the rooms (its Bottega Veneta and couture suites are favoured by celebrities and one high-profile ruling family) and utterly modern service, which is to say warm and efficient in equal measure. And Hotel Eden, newly under the aegis of the Dorchester Collection – with a leafy location above the Spanish Steps, and the firm's top brass now masterminding a total renovation – is one to keep an eye on.

The lanes surrounding the famous Via Condotti house the alpha and omega of Italian and international luxury-goods purveyors, with the requisite queuing and closed-to-the-public spree privileges. Better, then, to seek out the city's independent designers and ateliers. The Via del Governo Vecchio is a lightning rod for them. Among the most appealing is the white and green lacquer shop of jeweller Delfina Delettrez. Unerring taste is in her DNA (her mother is Silvia Venturini Fendi) and whimsical originality in her jewels, which feature motifs of eyes, skulls and bees in everything from gold to leather. Rome's other great original contemporary jeweller is Iosselliani (Valentino co-creative director Maria Grazia Chiuri is a fan), whose shop, R-01-IOS on the Via del Leone, showcases statement pieces

Clockwise from right: the Villa Borghese and its grounds. Le Grand Bar at the St Regis Rome. Maxxi, the National Museum of the Art of the 21st Century. Bottom: Roscioli restaurant



signal leather-goods marque, recently rehabilitated by an enterprising young former PR – sells an elegant edit of satchels, briefcases and its signature



A Gagosian Gallery seals the city's status as a centre of contemporary culture

equally profound inspiration in the opulent Galleria Doria Pamphilij, densely hung with 17th-century masters (and still inhabited by the Doria heirs).

What draws the headlines these days, however, are 21st-century attractions. If an outpost of Gagosian Galleries doesn't

where two millennia ago imperial fleets would disgorge produce and livestock from the farthest reaches of the empire.

Which brings us to a topic close to the heart, and seminal to the contentions, of every Roman: where to eat. All foodie counsel – in print, blog or tweet form – will lead you to Roscioli, near the Campo

de' Fiori, which happens to live up to its hype; brothers Alessandro and Pierluigi Roscioli are men of few words but prodigious talents, and under their aegis standards such as *bucatini all'amatriciana* are elevated in the surrounds of a high-spec delicatessen. Opinion divides as to the city's best for fish: purists lean towards San Lorenzo, but Osteria La Gensola, on a tiny isosceles of a piazza in Trastevere, takes the vote for breadth and creativity of presentation – and for the

crisp, salty *panelle* plonked down at each table as an *amuse-bouche* (the Roman classics are ably represented here, too).

For ages, Da Felice was the insider's destination in Testaccio, until two chefs defected from its kitchens to open Flavio al Velavevodetto, set right in the side of Monte Testaccio, preparing a parade of Roman favourites, from *guanciale* and oxtail to artichokes and chicory. And you can't go wrong at an alfresco table at appealingly bourgeois Pierluigi, on the lovely Piazza de' Ricci, where the octopus carpaccio is parchment-thin and tender.

fashioned from gold-plated chain and chunky semi-precious stones.

It is the received sartorial wisdom that Naples is home to great Italian menswear and its most venerated names, but Rome gets to play the Pope card. At Ditta Annibale Gammarelli (founded 1798), set almost in the shadow of the Pantheon, ecclesiastical splendour is the order of the day for His Holiness and innumerable clerics, cardinals and bishops. The layperson can also partake of bespoke suiting – or simply a pair of whisper-light woollen *calze* (purple and red being the favoured stock of these socks). Saddler's Union – in its 1950s heyday the city's

riveted saddle-bag style from a spare space on the absurdly photogenic Via Margutta. And doyenne of Tuscan style Ilaria Miani showcases her chic linens and home accessories in a double-fronted shop on the Via Monserrato, a stone's throw from the Palazzo Farnese.

From that palazzo's Michelangelo-designed façade and Caracci frescoes to the denuded monoliths of the Baths of Caracalla, rugged battlements of the Castel Sant'Angelo and perfect interior space of the Pantheon, history's narrative unspools everywhere. Deep peace can be found amid the tall pines in the parkland surrounding the Villa Borghese, and

seal a city's status as a legitimate centre of contemporary culture, it's hard to say what does. At Maxxi, the Zaha Hadid-designed National Museum of the Art of the 21st Century, creations from the very recent past and present get enthusiastic billing. Last year's exhibitions featured the work of South African William Kentridge and *arte povera* practitioner Alighiero Boetti. And in the once working-class, now-gentrifying neighbourhood of Testaccio, a slick satellite of Macro, Rome's museum of contemporary art, has been installed in a complex of 19th-century slaughterhouses beside the Tiber – themselves constructed on a site

Finally, it's worth venturing out to leafy, quiet Parioli to the place everyone is talking about – Metamorfosi. Postcard Italian this is not. The chef and sous-chef are Colombian and Swedish respectively, while the dining room has concrete floors and there's bad-ish soft rock on the sound system. But the food plays brilliantly with traditional elements in unexpected presentations, from "lollipops" of *cinta senese* ham to a flourishy take on carbonara (complete with pecorino foam) to sublime spaghetti with a dusting of dried-mussel powder. Plenty of style, without forsaking substance, and respect for tradition. Sounds Roman enough. ♦

THE HIT LIST

HOTELS

Prices are for a double room per night, including breakfast. **Hotel de Russie**, Via del Babuino 9 (+3906-328 8881; www.hotelde-russie.it), €814. **Hotel Eden**, Via Ludovico 49 (+3906-478 121; www.dorchestercollection.com), €687. **JK Place Roma**, Via Monte d'Oro 30 (+3906-982 634; www.jkroma.com), €600. **Portrait Roma**, Via Bocca di Leone 23 (+3906-6938 0742; www.portraitroma.com), €410. **St Regis Rome**, Via VE Orlando 3 (+3906-47091; www.stregis.com), €580.

CAFES AND RESTAURANTS

Prices are for a three-course meal for one with half a bottle of wine.

Flavio al Velavevodetto, Via di Monte Testaccio 97 (+3906-574 4194), about €80. **Metamorfosi**, Via Giovanni Antonelli 30-32 (+3906-807 6839), about €90. **Osteria La Gensola**, Piazza della Gensola 15 (+3906-4202 0218), about €45. **Pierluigi**, Piazza de' Ricci 144 (+3906-686 1302), about €60. **Roscioli**, Via del Giubbbonari 21 (+3906-687 5287), about €55.

SHOPS

Delfina Delettrez, Via del Governo Vecchio 67 (+3906-6813 4105). **Ditta Annibale Gammarelli**, Via di Santa Chiara 34 (+3906-6880 1314). **Ilaria Miani**, Via Monserrato 35 (+3906-683 3160). **Iosselliani R-01-105**, Via del Leone 21 (+3906-4544

9987). **Saddler's Union**, Via Margutta 11 (+3906-3212 0237).

SIGHTS AND GALLERIES

Baths of Caracalla, Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 52 (+3906-3996 7700). **Castel Sant'Angelo**, Lungotevere Castello 50 (+3906-681 9111). **Gagosian Gallery**, Via



Francesco Crispi 16 (+3906-4208 6498). **Galleria Doria Pamphili**, Via del Corso 305 (+3906-679 7323). **Macro Testaccio**, Piazza O Giustiniani 4 (+3906-6710 70400). **Maxxi**, Via Guido Reni 4A (+3906-320 1954). **Palazzo Farnese**, Piazza Farnese 67 (+3906-0606 0884). **Pantheon**, Piazza della Rotonda (+3906-6830 0230). **Villa Borghese**, Piazzale del Museo Borghese 5 (+3906-841 3979).

LESS THAN AN HOUR AWAY

Venerated chef Antonello Colonna opened his **Vallefredda Resort** (+3906-951 0032; www.antonellocolonnareort.it) in Labico, in a hypermodern permutation of a Lazio farmhouse 50km

from the centre of town, in 2012. The Michelin-starred restaurant is the reason to come; the full-service spa and 50-acre grounds, with a huge kitchen garden, are reasons to linger.

WHEN TO GO

For fine weather and thinner crowds, May and late September are ideal. January and February is the quietest time of the year, and August is to be avoided.

HOW TO GET THERE

British Airways (0844-493 0787; www.ba.com) flies five times a day from London Heathrow and once from Gatwick, from £79. **EasyJet** (0843-104 5000; www.easyjet.com) flies three times a day from Gatwick, from £80.

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