

La dolce Roma

To explore Rome is to discover a culinary wonderland where history is interlaced in every step. Avoid the tourist traps and use our guide to seek out its hidden gems and the city will leave an indelible impression

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Whenever I am in Rome I feel as if I am at the epicentre of civilisation. It oozes history and its energy and ancient charm are intoxicating. In Rome, the best food is simple and honest and found in back streets off the well-trodden tourist track. The locals swoon over pizza bianca baked around the clock at Forno di Campo de' Fiori or at Forno del Ghetto, a kosher bakery that has been baking for more than a hundred years. Make sure you also try the crusty *ossi* — it's a perfect snack. Others go weak-kneed over the crisply deep-fried salt cod (*filetto di baccala*) served from hole-in-the wall establishments across town. When in season, broad beans (*fava*), artichokes (*carciofi*) and kale (*cavolo nero*) can't be beaten, and Romans breathe new life into humble broccoli — steamed and tossed with fried anchovy crumbs with a decent lashing of garlic and a hint of dried chilli. Be sure to try *saltimbocca alla Romana* — veal escalope pan-fried with sage and prosciutto — or the perfect simplicity of *quadrucci e piselli* — short pasta and peas, best in early spring when peas are small, tender and sweet, tossed with pancetta and garlic. My idea of heaven.

When in Rome, I generally eat at the local osterias, enotecas and trattorias. They are more casual, relaxed and vibrant than the upmarket ristoranti, the food is usually terrific and they are easy on the wallet. My favourites include Al Moro, where vegetables play a starring role along with delicious calamari and salt cod. Trimani Enoteca has a great list of wines by the glass and a buzzy atmosphere, while Tuttifrutti has a small menu of seasonal favourites (and I love its name). Da Francesco is noisy, fast paced and one of my all-time favourites. Try its steak with balsamic and focaccia with shavings of raw ham, always finishing with a silken wobbly perfectly made panna cotta drizzled with a local Acacia honey. Osteria der Belli does a mean spaghetti with clams while Massimo Riccioli's seafood menu at La Rosetta is worth exploring.

If you're after hearty Roman classics such as pigeon

wrapped in bacon, tripe or deep fried artichoke hearts, stuffed zucchini flowers or pasta with house-made Botticella sauce — a red pesto made with wild herbs — then go directly to Ristorante La Botticella.

Seafood features across all menus — Romans love their seafood and the connection to Sicily and its food culture is also evident in many places. Be sure to try Ristorante Tullio, La Rosetta or Ristorante Il Sanlorenzo for their terrific seafood menus.

Many new places featuring contemporary design are favourite haunts of the young spirited crowd, especially at weekends. Make sure you put Enoteca Palatium on your list. A recent addition to the thriving Roman scene, it's dedicated to the food and wine of the Lazio — the region around Rome — as is Enoteca Provincia Romana.

There is simply so much choice. There are family-operated small businesses where recipes have remained the same generation after generation — where going back time and again shows very little has changed. There is comfort in long-held traditions. However, there is also a new wave of contemporary food that honours its culinary traditions with an injection of creativity yet remains distinctly Italian. The Roman table is convivial and rowdy.

Wherever you go, it pays to polish up on a few Italian food terms to make navigating a menu easier. Better still, engage with your waiter, trust their direction and advice — they are the locals, after all, and more often than not you will discover something new, whether it's food or wine. As anywhere, avoid the tourist menus displayed in several languages. It's a waste of time getting disappointed with poor food and rough or dismissive service.

Our first visit to Rome in the 90s was in early spring and at the suggestion of trusted local advice we took a taxi to the south, beyond the periphery of the city to Ariccia, one of the hill towns of Castelli Romani near Frascati, the town named after its well-known white wine. We had the most memorable dinner in a modest family-run small dining room feasting on porcini mushrooms, a stand-out



The vegetable displays at the Campo dei Fiori market are always vibrant whatever the time of year

risotto and porchetta (suckling pig). Another time, we drove across Italy and as we approached the city, we stopped at a little osteria on the outskirts of town and ate a sublime seafood risotto — unfussy yet perfect.

The markets and the menus reflect the seasons. The Campo dei Fiori market reveals seasonality in abundance. With the surrounding food shops and bars, it's a food lover's paradise and is considered one of the best produce markets in the city. Locals flock here each morning (except Sundays) to choose from the displays of vegetables, fruit and flowers that are always vibrant whatever the time of year. Not to be missed is Antica Norcineria Viola, a temple of pork with cured meats, hams, sausages and pork cuts for home cooking. There's also a wonderful smaller market across the river in Trastevere at Piazza di San Cosimato.

The Esquilino market near the Colosseum pulses with life and vitality. It's a covered market on Via Principe Amedeo near the Termini train station, with abundant displays of seasonal and regional fruit and vegetables, seafood, meat, Indian and African spices and exotic tropical fruits. The wild strawberries from Nemi are exquisite when in season. It's an essential pit stop to get a sense of local life and better still if you have the opportunity to cook. Almost as important as a visit to the Forum is a pit stop at Panella, a Roman institution that has been baking bread and pastries for more than a century — just follow the heady aroma. If you are wandering in the vicinity of the Forum and Via Nazionale, explore the ancient covered Mercati Traianei (Trajan's Market). Spread across several floors, it is an extraordinary sight and you can easily imagine the liveliness of the place in its heyday.

Rome is a great city for a food pilgrimage — just see where your walking takes you or plan your walks to take in some recommended places. Punctuate visits to historic sites with regular stops at enotecas, cafes or restaurants and your experience of the city will leave an indelible impression. If you are fortunate enough to visit in November or early December, you will be blessed with white truffles, as they appear in many guises on menus everywhere.

Much of the traditional food of Rome is based on Jewish recipes and this becomes evident when you wander the narrow streets of the Ghetto, the old Jewish quarter. Here history is reflected in many of the city's favourite dishes — salt cod, fried whole artichokes and the like. The food shops in this district, such as the wonderful patisserie Boccione, captivate with their sensuous appeal. I always make a pilgrimage to Roscioli, a food store with stools at the counter — it's an ideal deli for takeaway. The pizza is sensational and down the road is its salumeria, a showcase of cured meats. It's one of the best places to try *bucatini all'amatriciana*, one of Rome's most notable pasta dishes. Teichner is located on a pedestrian square that is home to this gastronomic heaven, a food shop with luxury specialties, charcuterie and sweets. For a cheese blitz, I head to Antica Caciara to sample some of the many and varied regional cheeses of Italy and Europe.

The Vatican overlooks the historic centre of the city across the river Tiber. We have stood in Saint Peter's Square on Palm Sunday with many thousands of pilgrims facing St Peter's Basilica as the Pope gave his Easter message. I found it more fascinating to wander the nearby narrow streets of the Borgo district to gauge the hum of everyday urban life, stumbling upon a couple of the city's well-known and loved food shops. Franchi is like a typical Parisian traiteur with its fabulous display of prosciutto, salami and all things porky, regional cheeses and luxurious treats such as truffles when in season, caviar and prepared foods to go. Another specialty grocer is next door — Castroni is a culinary wonderland on the main street that connects the Vatican to Piazza del Popolo across the river. When you get to the Piazza, stop at Caffè Rosati for an espresso and sweet snack. Up the road near the Villa Borghese and the Spanish steps at Piazza di Spagna is Antico Caffè Greco, a Roman institution. It's one of my essential morning pit stops for a taste of stylish local life, before heading down Via Condotti or Via Borgognona to



Turn down any alleyway in Rome and you're likely to discover some small place that entrances

the grand Via del Corso. An evening promenade along the Tiber River is de rigueur before or after dinner.

It wouldn't be a visit to Rome without a late afternoon Campari and freshly squeezed blood orange juice at one of the outdoor bars that line Piazza Navona while taking in the sights at this historic spot. There are several hidden gems to try in the narrow streets tucked away from the square. A little further from here, I like to stop off for a drink at Enoteca Cavour 313 near the Forum, a bar menu that features one of the most serious wine cellars in the city. I always try a glass of something I haven't tasted before.

Rome is gelato heaven and my favourites include Gelateria Buccianti near the Pantheon, Giolitti near Via del Corso or Il Gelato di San Crispino a couple of minutes from Trevi Fountain. Across the river at Trastevere, the feel is more village-like and bohemian than other parts of town and the streets are abuzz with activity in the evenings, so it's a great place to hang out. Our good friend Jonathon lives on the top floor of an old apartment block

and his rooftop terrace, adorned with pots of herbs and vegetables, is one of the best places to hang out on a summer's eve — with many of the city's historic landmarks in full view. He guides us carefully past the trattorias that rely on tourist trade; instead we eat with the locals, gaining a far better insight into Roman cuisine and far better food. However, some of the best food is what he cooks at home and serves on his roof terrace. In this part of town, as in many, the small bars, cafes, shops and boutiques stand side by side with medieval churches and Renaissance villas. Turn down a small alleyway and, more often than not, you'll find some small place that beckons — so get off the main thoroughfares to discover its secrets.

Rome is a city that is constantly open to discovery. It is a city of temptation with its fascinating history etched into every facet of everyday life and seemingly every morsel of food. It's impossible not to have a good time in Rome, where the atmosphere is infectious and food is taken seriously and having a good time even more so.

Where to eat

Antico Caffè Greco

Via Condotti 86
06 679 1700

Antico Forno del Ghetto

Piazza Costaguti 30
06 6880 3012

Antico Forno Roscioli

Via dei Chiavari 34, near
Campo dei Fiori
06 687 5287

Caffè Rosati

Piazza del Popolo
06 322 5859

Il Forno Campo de' Fiori

Vicolo del Gallo 14
06 6880 6662

Tuttifrutti

Via Luca della Robbia 3/A
06 575 7902

Al Moro

Vicolo delle Bollette 13
06 678 3495

Trimani Enoteca

Via Goito 20, Esquilino
06 4469661

Enoteca Palatium

Via Frattina 94
06 6920 2132

Da Francesco

Piazza del Fico 29, near
Largo dei Librai
06 686 4009

Osteria der Belli

Piazza di San Apollonia 11
06 580 3782

La Rosetta

Via della Rosetta 8/9
06 6861002

Enoteca Provincia Romana

Foro Traiano 82
06 6994 0273

Ristorante Il Sanlorenzo

Via dei Chiavari 4 (near
Campo dei Fiori)
06 686 5097

Ristorante La Botticella

Vicolo del Leopardò
06 581 4738

Ristorante Tullio

Via San di Nicola da
Tolentino 26 (off Piazza
Barberini, near Via Veneto)
06 474 5560

Filippo la Mantia

Majestic Hotel,
Via Liguria 1
06 4214 4715
(Lighter flavours and
textures showcasing the
chef's Sicilian heritage)

Enoteca Cavour 313

Via Cavour 313 (near
the Forum)
06 6785496

Food shops

Mercato Campo de' Fiori

Piazza Campo de' Fiori



Dining in Rome is warm and convivial and there are so many casual restaurants to choose from

Antico Forno del Ghetto

Piazza Costaguti 30
06 6880 3012

Boccione

Via del Portico d'Ottavia 1
06 687 8637

Panella

Via Merulana 54
06 487 2651

Roscioli

Via dei Giubbonari 21
06 687 5287

Castroni

Via Cola di Rienzo 196
06 687 4383

Franchi

Via Cola di Rienzo 204
06 687 4651

Antica Norcineria Viola

Campo de' Fiori 43
06 6880 6114

Teichner

Piazza san Lorenzo in
Lucina 17
06 687 1449

Giolitti Gelato

Via Uffici del Vicario 40
06 699 1243

Antica Caciara

Via san Francisco a ripa 140
06 581 2815

Gelateria Buccianti

Piazza Cavour 18A
06 320 3257

Il Gelato di San Crispino

Via della Panetteria 42
06 679 3924.

