

Client: Portrait Roma
Source: Sunday Times Travel Magazine
Date: November 2018



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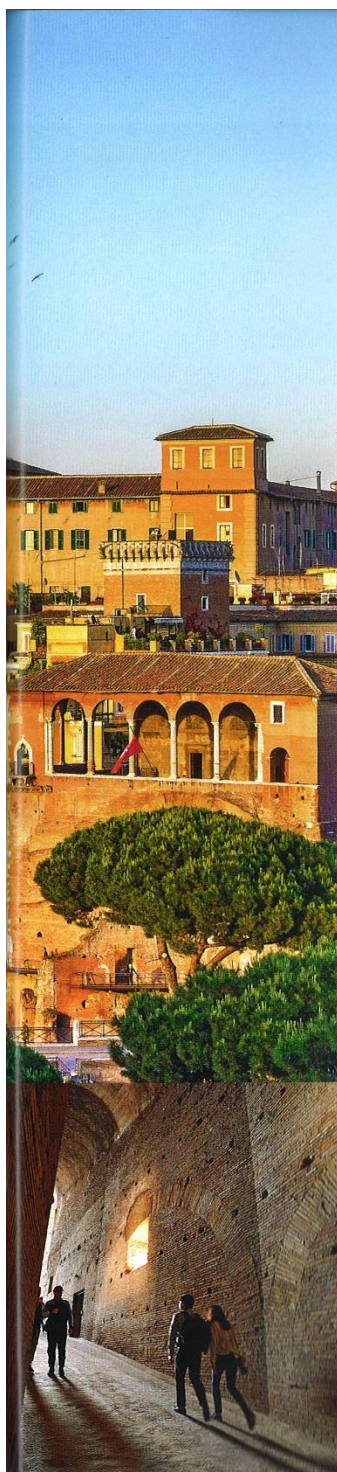
Secret Rome

Cringe at crowds? You can have the city to yourself — here's how...

It may not seem like it if you're caught in an hour-long queue for the Vatican Museum — but escaping the crowds in Rome is easy. Since everyone has the same tick-list, you need only sidestep their targets (and follow our tips) and you'll find heart-stopping art, museums and monuments that most people simply never see... **By Sean Newsom**



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instant escapes

CUT-OUT-AND-GO GUIDE | SECRET ROME

SEE & DO

● Two thousand years on, it's sculpture that offers the most vivid link to Ancient Rome — and the Palazzo Massimo Alle Terme is the place to see it, not least because the tourist crowds rarely find it. Clear, intelligent displays chart the transformation from Republican realism to the flattery of the Empire — and **every stylistic shift is illustrated with work of staggering virtuosity**. Come at lunch and you may find yourself alone (museonazionale.romano.beniculturali.it; £9; ① on map).

● Sometimes, Rome's secrets are hidden in plain sight. Trajan's Markets, across the road from the Capitoline Hill, are rendered almost invisible by their cloak of dark, utilitarian brick. Don't be fooled. Inside, you'll discover one of Rome's most complete Imperial monuments: a complex of offices and auditoria, built between 100AD and 110AD, to service Emperor Trajan's new forum. **Videos, sculpture and lumps of fallen masonry bring to life an era of vaulting architectural ambition** (mercatiditraiano.it; £13.50; ②).

● Nearby, discover how much of the ancient city still exists beneath your feet by burrowing below the Palazzo Valentini on a tour of Le Domus Roman's excavations (palazzo.valentini.it; £11; ③). Glass floors and clever lighting enhance the remains, while **audio-visual displays rebuild and redecorate the walls and ceilings**. The tour ends with part of the temple of Trajan that was only unearthed in 2011.

The glory of Rome: the Forum and Trajan's Markets; below, sculptures in the Palazzo Massimo; the Domitian Ramp, the route the emperors took from the Imperial Palace on Palatine Hill to the Forum

HOW TO GET AROUND

Buy a Roma Pass (£25 for 48hrs; romapass.it) for unlimited free public transport, and use your smartphone map to find out which bus routes to use. It also grants free entry to one museum and discount rates for many more.

● Art is everywhere in Rome, much of it overlooked. Every day, hundreds hurry past Sant' Agostino's church ④ en route to the Piazza Navona ⑤, without giving it a second thought. But wander inside, and in the southwestern corner you'll find Caravaggio's *Madonna di Loreto*, shrouded in gloom. For 90p the church will turn on a light to reveal the Madonna and child receiving two barefoot pilgrims. **There are none of the usual Baroque niceties here — just a frank portrayal of faith and grinding poverty**. No wonder ordinary Romans loved it.

● Need a break from the past? Leave the crowds behind by riding metro line A to Flaminio, then tram line 2 to Apollodoro, and you'll find the city's best modern building, Maxxi. **Zaha Hadid's breathtaking spaghetti of concrete houses the national museum of 21st-century art and architecture**, and showcases work by Anish Kapoor, Anselm Kiefer et al. But really it's the building that's the star, right down to its sinuous steel staircases (maxxi.art; £11; ⑥).

● Ultimately, however, it's the layer cake of Rome's history that has the greatest allure, and you'll see several more slices at the Forum ⑦ and the Palatine Hill ⑧. Buy the £16 Super ticket online (coopculture.it) and try to go on a Sunday. That way, you get **access to all seven of the mini-sites closed to ordinary ticket holders**. Highlights include the Domitian Ramp ⑨, used by the emperors to descend from their palaces, and the frescoes of the House of Augustus ⑩, Rome's first emperor.

● Final secret: the Sistine Chapel isn't always choked with tourists. Private-tour specialists such as Eyes of Rome can get you in at 8.30am, 30 minutes before the public (eyesofrome.com; £21pp). But a cheaper trick is to book a timed ticket for mid-afternoon and make the chapel your last stop (musei.vaticani.va; £19 or £15 online; ⑪). At 5pm everyone heads off, which gives you an hour before the attendants show you the door. Keep your eyes on the ceiling — **Michelangelo's brilliantly choreographed ballet of Old Testament stories eclipses every other painting in the room** — including his own *Last Judgment*. ➤



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EAT

● Pizza joint

ALLE CARRETTE (Pizzas about £7)

Because: Romans love the wood-fired pizzas served in this labyrinthine joint. 'White' pizzas (without tomato) are the ones to go for, piled high with the likes of rocket and prosciutto. **Travel's tip:** Head to the courtyard at the back — it's where you'll find the biggest buzz. Via della Madonna dei Monti 95; 00 39 06 679 2770; ⑩.

● Bohemian wine bar

LA BARRIQUE (Mains about £13)

Because: Floor-to-ceiling bottles and a '70s soundtrack give this enoteca a laid-back, decadent vibe. And the homemade ravioli is delicious. **Travel's tip:** Order by the glass, so you can try more of the excellent wine list. Via del Boschetto 41b; 00 39 06 4782 5953; ⑩.

● Local favourite

GRAPPOLO D'ORO (Mains about £13)

Because: Reasonable prices and strong, straightforward flavours make this family-run osteria a hit with gossipy local twentysomethings. **Travel's tip:** Order the Menu Roman Route — it's a bargain, with three courses for just £26pp. Piazza della Cancelleria 80; 00 39 06 689 7080; hosteriagrappolodoro.it; ⑩.

● Let's experiment

RETROBOTTEGA (Mains about £22)

Because: Gastro restaurant meets chemistry lab in this chic hole-in-the-wall, where diners perch on stools and the kitchen distils intense flavours from simple ingredients. The creamy, smoked-eel risotto is the star turn. **Travel's tip:** Haven't booked? Most locals don't arrive 'til 9pm, so if you go at 7pm, they'll squeeze you in. Via della Stelletta 4; 00 39 06 6813 6310; retro-bottega.com; ⑩.

● Michelin treat

PERME (Mains about £36)

Because: Shrouded in vines just off trendy Via del Pellegrino, Giulio Terrinoni's crisp, contemporary restaurant is the perfect setting for his Michelin-starred cuisine. **Travel's tip:** Come for lunchtime *tappi*, *tapas*-like confections such as seared mackerel with red cabbage and burrata (£8 a pop). Vicolo del Malpasso 9; 00 39 06 6877365; giulioterrinoni.it; ⑩.

TIME FOR A TOAST?

Trentadocci Spumante is Italy's secret fizz. A ridiculously underrated wine from the Adige valley in the Italian Alps, it's made in the same way as Champagne, but is half the price (£5.50 a glass).

JOIN THE HIP CROWD

Looking for an evening in a district that isn't jam-packed with tourists? Head to Monti, on the long slope of the Quirinal Hill as it descends to the Colosseum. Via del Boschetto and Via Urbana are at the heart of this village-y, but very Roman scene.



DRINK & SHOP

● Library of wine

IL GOCCETTO

Because: A long list of wines by the glass make this vibrant bar a great place to get acquainted with Italian vino. **Travel's tip:** If you don't want to end up drinking outside, go when it opens at 12pm or 6.30pm and nab a table inside. Via dei Banchi Vecchi 14; ⑩.

● Cobblestones & cocktails

SOTTOSOPRA

Because: Trastevere's nightlife isn't hard to find — it spills out from this tiny cocktail bar across Piazza Trilussa, and keeps going 'til 2am. **Travel's tip:** If you can't get one of the outside tables, it's okay to hang out on the steps of the fountain on the piazza instead. Via di Ponte Sisto 67; sottosopra-roma.it; ⑩.

● Arty vibe

SACRIPANTE GALLERY

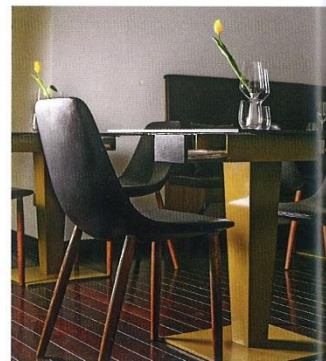
Because: Art gallery meets speakeasy in this cavernous cocktail bar that rambles through the shabby-chic rooms of a former convent. You'll mix with Monti's relaxed, trendy hipsters. **Travel's tip:** Check its Facebook page for live music. Via Panisperna 59; ⑩.



ASK THE LOCAL

Stefania Pistone is an archaeologist and architectural historian, who guides private tours

“When I have friends in town, I take them to the Baths of Caracalla ⑩, which are way off the tourist map. A vast 3rd-century complex, it's a great introduction to later Roman architecture and has lovely mosaic floors. It's not far from the Montemartini Museum ⑩, a former power station, now a museum of classical sculpture. We'll then take metro line B to Monti for a taste of the rustic cuisine of Le Marche at the family-run Trattoria Monti ⑩, followed by a short walk to the Basilica of Santa Prassede ⑩ to see its Byzantine mosaics. Then we'll head to the Al Vino Al Vino enoteca on Via dei Serpenti ⑩, with its collection of Italian wines.



STAY

● Budget-friendly

THE BEEHIVE HOTEL & HOSTEL

(Doubles from £61, room-only)

Because: A couple of blocks north of Termini station, this friendly, bookish hotel has bright and airy double rooms as well as dorms, a lovely veggie caff, and — best of all — the perfect shaded terrace for some downtime. **Travel's tip:** Only the annexe rooms have air-con (unlike those in the main building), so book here if you prefer a cool room. Via Marghera 8; the-beehive.com; ⑩.

● Minimalist chic

ROME LIFE (Doubles from £148, B&B)

Because: Posh digs — and free use of a smartphone — come at a reasonable price in this chic, cream-and-chocolate four-star. The staff are quick to help if you need them, while the Via del Boschetto nearby solves every 'Where shall we eat?' conundrum. **Travel's tip:** Register online with the hotel in a couple of clicks for instant room-rate discounts. Via Palermo 10/12; romelifehotel.com; ⑩.

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● **Comfort & convenience**
STARHOTELS METROPOLE (Doubles from £156, room-only)
Because: It may be tour-party central, but this gleaming, efficient four-star has well-planned rooms, comfy beds, and puts Secret Rome on your doorstep — the Palazzo Massimo is a block away, Monti's nightlife a 10-minute stroll. **Travel's tip:** Caffè Washington next door is the place for your morning espresso, rather than the hotel's windowless breakfast room. Via Principe Amedeo 3; starhotels.com; ②.

● **High-ceilinged elegance**
THE FIFTEEN KEYS (Doubles from £165, B&B)
Because: Big windows, bold colours and chatty, helpful staff give this boutique Monti hotel an airy, laid-back atmosphere, while posh linen and Malin+Goetz toiletries add a dash of luxe. **Travel's tip:** Feeling brave? The hotel will organise Vespa hire at £32 a day — but only risk it at weekends when the streets are quieter. Via Urbana, 6/7; fifteenkeys.com; ②.

A SIGHT TO SEE

Got an hour to spare before you go back to the airport? The remains of the Emperor Diocletian's vast baths complex is five minutes' walk from the Metropole (coopculture.it)

Di(n)e for style: clockwise from top left, the Michelin-starred Per Me; room in Starhotels Metropole; the lively Sottosopra cocktail bar in Trastevere district; dessert at the family-run Grappolo d'Oro; entrance to the breakfast room at the boutique Fifteen Keys in Monti

● **Deluxe B&B**
PIAZZA DI SPAGNA 9 (Doubles from £214, room-only)
Because: This elegant and arty B&B is right by the Piazza di Spagna and puts fresh pancakes on your breakfast table. The owner is an interior designer and the rooms showcase her work — there's a sense of luxury here that far outstrips the price. **Travel's tip:** There are only six bedrooms, so you'll need to book well ahead. Piazza di Spagna 9; piazzadispanna9.it; ②.

● **Suite dreams**
PORTRAIT ROMA (Studios from £427, B&B)
Because: Calm, '50s-flavoured decor and images of Salvatore Ferragamo shoes give this all-suite boutique hotel plenty of class, but it's the butler-style service that elevates it into the Roman superleague. **Travel's tip:** You don't need to book the Penthouse for a Spanish Steps view. The Deluxe Studio (6th floor) is a fraction of the price, and has a balcony vista, too. Via Bocca di Leone 23; lungarnocollection.com; ②.

GET ME THERE GO INDEPENDENT

BA and **Alitalia** both fly to Fiumicino from Heathrow; BA flies from £35 one-way. **EasyJet** flies to Fiumicino from Luton, Gatwick and Bristol from £65 return, and **Ryanair** flies to Ciampino from Stansted, Manchester, Edinburgh, Glasgow and East Midlands from £34 return. **Fiumicino** is Rome's main airport and has its own railway station, which connects with Termini in the city centre. From **Ciampino** airport, the easiest way into town is on one of the express bus services (£4.50).

GO PACKAGED

Citalia (citalia.com) has three-night breaks in Rome from £403pp, B&B, staying in the Starhotels Metropole, including private transfers and return flights from Heathrow. Or try **Kirker** (kirkerholidays.com) or **Thomas Cook** (thomascok.com).

FURTHER INFORMATION

See Rome's official tourism website at turismoroma.it. ■