

36 Hours

ROME

With a bit of planning, the Eternal City can be at its most bewitching at the onset of winter.



PHOTOGRAPHS BY SUSAN WRIGHT FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

From left: the National Roman Museum, an example of world-class ancient art and architecture in Rome; Monteforte on Via del Pellegrino, where visitors and residents can refuel with coffee and pastries; a street featuring Bar del Fico.

By DAVID LASKIN

For all its imperial and papal pomp and circumstance, Rome at heart is a beautiful child — raucous, dreamy, secretive, a touch spoiled, by turns exasperating and enchanting. The child is on its best behavior during “le feste” — the winter holidays. High season crowds thin, and dazzling light displays and slanting sunbeams compensate for the short days. Today’s Rome is paradoxical: Even as many historic neighborhoods fall to mass-touristic homogeneity, outlying districts are becoming more vibrant and varied. For an authentic Roman holiday, get out of the centro storico and sample the pizza stalls of the Testaccio market and the funky wares at the nearby Porta Portese Sunday flea market, the nightclubs of San Lorenzo and Tiburtina, and neighborhood gelateria like Neve di Latte and La Mucca Bianca. Tranquility has never been Rome’s strong suit. But with a bit of planning (and flexibility), tourists will find the Eternal City can be at its most bewitching at the onset of winter. (Though buses and trams crisscross the city, you’ll save time with two easy-to-navigate apps — My Taxi and It Taxi.)

ing labyrinth of Renaissance and Baroque Rome to the venerable Bar del Fico, a combination bistro and bar where you can sip a Negroni or mescol infused with ginger beer and chili (12 euros), or knock back a brandy alongside the young Romans who gather here nightly to sip and dance. D.J. sets thump away until 2 a.m.

Saturday

9 A.M. ► CLASSICS WITHOUT CROWDS

The multibranch National Roman Museum is still the city’s best kept secret for world-class ancient art and architecture. The two branches flanking the Termini Station — the Palazzo Massimo and the Baths of Diocletian — complement each other perfectly. The Massimo’s collection of classical bronzes, mosaics and wall paintings reveal the breadth and finesse of Roman artistry, while the baths complex, once the empire’s largest, surrounds you with soaring masonry ruins, whispering fountains, and an immense cloister attributed to Michelangelo.

11:30 A.M. ► TOMB WITH A VIEW

A quick bus or cab ride from the museums delivers you to a gem that few Romans, let alone visitors, know about: the Mausoleum of Santa Costanza. Folded into a green hillside that rises above the busy artery of Via Nomentana, the circular templelike tomb of the daughter of Rome’s first Christian emperor preserves a mosaic cycle of astonishing exuberance and delicacy. Save a few minutes before the noon closing time for the seventh-century church of Sant’Agnese Fuori le Mura in the same complex. The teenage martyr venerated here presides over the apse in an austere, Byzantine-style mosaic of elongated figures set against a gold background.

12:30 P.M. ► LUNCH BREAK

Gustando e Degustando, a 10-minute walk from Santa Costanza, is the hole-in-the-wall you dream of: a handful of tables, a chalkboard of daily specials, oldies burbling in the background, and simple food of notable freshness. Beef strips on a bed of arugula (8 euros) is light and flavorful; octopus, pesto and potatoes (10 euros) has a nice balance of succulent and savory. An extensive list of beers, wines and spirits makes this an equally good choice for an afternoon aperitif.

3 P.M. ► SPENDING SPREE

What a stroke of luck that two of Renaissance Rome’s most ravishing streets, Via del Pellegrino and the intersecting Via dei Banchi Vecchi, are lined with some of the city’s most tempting boutiques. From Campo de’ Fiori, pick up Via del Pellegrino and work your way west, stopping at Solodue, for shoes, tops and accessories; Retropose, for oversize bags in eye-popping colors; Sciam, for glass baubles and Murano goblets; Libreria del Viaggiatore for travel books; and Libreria il Minotauro, a warren stuffed with children’s toys and books. Refuel with a coffee and pastry at Monteforte, and continue past the patrician palaces to Banchivecchi Pellami, via dei Banchi Vecchi, 40, a venerable family-run shop offering classic Italian-made belts and wallets.



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6 P.M. ► DELIGHT THE INNER CHILD

No one loves a crèche — presepio in Italian — more than the Italians, and at the International Museum of the Presepio you can revel in the finest examples of this folk art from all over the world and down through the ages. Open only on Wednesdays and Saturdays from 5 to 7:30 p.m. (with extended hours from Christmas to Jan. 6), the museum is in the basement of the tiny church of SS. Quirico e Giulitta, at the edge of Monti.

9 P.M. ► RAW AND COOKED

Packed nightly with well-heeled Romans, Ristorante Ottavio is worth the cab ride out to the southern fringe of the Esquilino district for supremely fresh seafood, both raw and cooked, served with low-key elegance and practiced flair. Let your server guide you to house specialties and daily catches, which might include plump shrimp with sweet Trochea onions (38.50 euros), linguine with small octopus, and a lavish platter of boiled lobster studded with potatoes and tomatoes (45 euro).

11 P.M. ► NEIGHBORHOOD BISTRO

Brooklyn hipster hang meets London pub at Sazerac, a cozy neighborhood boite with a great soundtrack (from rock to reggae) just around the corner from Ottavio. Grab a tiny bistro table and settle in with a My Sazerac (cognac, absinthe and Morlacco bitters, 7 euros), a Fog Cutter (rum, cognac, gin and lime, 7 euros) or artisanal beer. For more serious partying and dancing later in the evening, continue on to Circolo degli Illuminati in the Ostiense neighborhood or the recently opened Live Alcazar in Trastevere.

Sunday

10:30 A.M. ► SCALE THE HEIGHTS

The Janiculum, Rome’s second-highest and

LODGING

Rental apartments are abundant around the Borgo, the Spanish Steps, Campo de’ Fiori and the Coliseum. Expect to pay \$80 to \$120 a night for a one-bedroom. The **Hotel Locarno** is an oasis of tranquility a stone’s throw from Piazza del Popolo. Double rooms from \$156. Across the piazza on a quaintly picturesque street, the **Margutta 19** offers 16 modern rooms and suites surrounding a terraced hillside. Doubles with breakfast from \$450. **Hotel Raffaello**, between the Termini Station and the Monti neighborhood, is quiet and convenient, starting at \$111.

IF YOU GO

- 1 Ai Tre Scalini**, via Panisperna 251; aitrescalini.org/en/
- 2 SS Quatro Coronati**, via dei Santi Quattro 20; monacheagostinianeantiquattrocoronati.it
- 3 La Ciambella**, via dell’Arco della Ciambella 20; la-ciambella.it/en/la-ciambella
- 4 Bar del Fico**, Piazza del Fico, 26/286; bardelfico.com/en/
- 5 National Roman Museum, Massimo**: Largo di Villa Peretti; **Baths of Diocletian**: Viale Enrico de Nicola 76; museonazionaleromano.beniculturali.it
- 6 Santa Costanza and S. Agnese**, via Nomentana 349; santagnese.org
- 7 Gustando e Degustando**, via Marcantonio Boldetti 3/5; gustandoedegustando.it
- 8 Solodue**, via del Pellegrino 48; solodueitalia.it. **Retropose**, via del Pellegrino 60; retropose.com. **Sciam**, via del Pellegrino 170; libreriaelviaggiatore.it
- 9 International Museum of the Presepio**, via Tor de’ Conti, 31/a; museopresepioroma.it
- 10 Ristorante Ottavio**, via di Santa Croce in Gerusalemme 9; ottavio.it
- 11 Sazerac Pub**, via Umberto Biancamano 80; facebook.com/SazeracPub
- 12 Janiculum Hill**, Passeggiata del Gianicolo
- 13 Antico Arco**, Piazzale Aurelio 7; anticoarco.it
- 14 Fatamorgana**, via Roma Libera 11; gelateriafatamorgana.com/web/

leafiest hill, has a glorious pedestrian path that rambles past huge sycamore trees, fountains, monuments, statues and stately palaces (many now embassies and academies). Pick up the path at the edge of Vatican City and join Romans for a leisurely ascent to the Fontanone — literally the Big Fountain — the immense early-17th-century water feature that Paolo Sorrentino used in the opening shots of his film “La Grande Bellezza.”

1 P.M. ► FAMILY LUNCH

Some of the same people you encountered on the Janiculum passeggiata may well be lunching beside you at Antico Arco, a sleek, stylish and deliciously adventurous restaurant at the summit of the hill just outside the Porta San Pancrazio. Seared scallops with red pepper and basil (22 euros) makes for a standout starter, and the spaghetti with pecorino and zucchini flowers (16 euros) is a welcome variation on the city’s ubiquitous pasta with cacio e pepe.

2:30 P.M. ► CIAO, GELATO

Even in winter, a visit to Rome is not complete without a cone or cup of gelato. Romans will argue fiercely that their neighborhood gelateria is the best, but no place has more original flavors than the Fatamorgana chain. Wasabi chocolate, and almond milk, mint and ginseng are just a few of the odder scoops on offer. Luckily, the Trastevere branch is an easy (downhill) walk from the top of the Janiculum.

Bites Lost Larson | CHICAGO

Reclaiming a Swedish Baking Heritage

When Chicago’s Andersonville neighborhood bid farewell to its beloved Swedish Bakery in February, it was as if a cake-shaped hole had been left in the historically Scandinavian neighborhood’s collective heart. The traditional Swedish, neon, green-domed cake had long been local legend.

When the pastry chef Bobby Schaffer, who had previously led the pastry programs at Michelin-starred Grace in Chicago and Blue Hill at Stone Barns in Pocantico Hills, N.Y., was searching for a space to open his new venture, he knew the neighborhood was in need of a local bakery.

“I’d always known that it was one of my favorite neighborhoods, having grown up here,” Mr. Schaffer said. “I really loved how it supported independent businesses and had this hometown charm to it.”

He also knew that he had Scandinavian heritage himself, the story of which had gone missing when his grandfather, whom Mr. Schaffer had never met, supposedly changed the family name from Larson to Schaffer after the man he’d worked for. He said that heritage “was never part of my



ANTHONY TAHLIER

A pickled herring sandwich on limpa with lingonberry jam, radish, fried onions and dill.

Lost Larson, 5318 North Clark Street, 773-944-0587. A meal for two is about \$20, not including coffee or tip.

upbringing; I didn’t know any cultural connection to that.”

And so he christened his bakery Lost Larson and set off with his sister Bree, who runs the front of the house, to Sweden, where they visited three or four bakeries a day in search of inspiration for the recipes he’d develop for hearty loaves of limpa, sweet, yeasty cardamom buns, and yes, even a homage to the Swedish princess cake.

I visited on a damp and dreary afternoon. An aromatic cloud of sugar, cardamom,

vanilla and bread immediately surrounded me. Every gleaming white marble cafe table was filled with patrons chatting over small plates of enticing food and mugs of hot coffee.

Not a single laptop was open. No one stared into a phone. No one was even shooting smartphone pictures of the otherwise Instagram-worthy pastry case. It was as though everyone had pledged to honor the spirit of “fika,” the Swedish coffee break.

Taking note, I left my phone in my bag as I helped my 4-year-old pull apart his flaky ham and cheese croissant. My husband and I shared two intriguing open-faced sandwiches: nudja and gianduja with spreadable spicy sausage, chocolate hazelnut spread, creamy ricotta, pumpkin seeds and two poached eggs; and pickled herring with salty, preserved fish, a bright lingonberry jam and paper-thin slices of radish and white onion.

So enamored was I with the limpa on which the herring sandwich was made that I took home an entire loaf. “Limpa” translates from Swedish simply into “loaf,” but usually refers to some sort of rye bread. Mr. Schaf-

fer’s version is aromatic, baked with uplifting orange peel, fennel and anise. At \$8 a loaf, it is a luxury item — and satisfying: I slathered thick slices with salted butter for three days thereafter. The miniature duchess cake (Mr. Schaffer’s take on the princess cake), however, with its tender vanilla sponge, jewel-toned raspberry gelée and a dreamy white chocolate marzipan mousse, disappeared posthaste.

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