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## 36 Hours in Rome

By [FRANK BRUNI](#)

THE explanation about to be offered isn't the conventional one, but it's plausible: [Rome](#) is called the Eternal City because you would need an eternity to do it justice. What you have is less than two days, and they're on a weekend, and that's not such a good thing. The expansion of budget airlines in [Europe](#) has created legions of two-day trippers and a mob scene around the Trevi Fountain on a Saturday at 3 p.m. that's scarier than spoiled ricotta. So you'll visit the fountain after midnight. You'll adjust, mix it up and manage to get a taste of Rome without having your time and patience swallowed by long lines and a constant crush of bodies. You'll be clever and fleet, and by the time you pull up stakes, you'll be satisfied. Maybe even eternally.

Friday

4:30 p.m.

1) DOME, SWEET DOME

Marble and more marble, papal corpses, a lofty dome that tickles the clouds and a little piece of statuary by Michelangelo called the Pietà — [St. Peter's Basilica](#) can't be missed. You're prepared for a mammoth church, but not for this much majesty, this much history. It's a primer for the rest of Rome. So you hit it first, beating the rush on Saturday and avoiding the throngs who gather to hear the pope on Sunday. And you're in position for your next introduction.

6 p.m.

2) EVEN CLOSER TO HEAVEN

To save time and breath, you've splurged on a taxi to [Piazzale Garibaldi](#) on the Janiculum Hill. The view will be fantastic: the loftiest and best in Rome. From this perch you can see the layout of most of the historic center and appreciate a skyline of a different, aged sort: cupolas and domes, like that of the Pantheon, that go back many centuries. You can giggle at what in Rome passes for a newcomer: the Vittoriano, that unthinkably ostentatious white typewriter of a building, built a century ago. Stroll south along the hilltop to the 17th-century "Fontanone," then walk down the staircase into Trastevere, a good example of a Roman neighborhood with narrow cobbled streets and the feel of a crumbling labyrinth.

8:30 p.m.

3) COLD NEVER FELT SO WARM

There are regular enotecas and then there's [Casa Blevé](#) (Via del Teatro Valle, 48-49; 39-06-686-4045), which is the enoteca as sumptuous nod to—and even send up of—Roman grandeur. It spreads through the ground floor of a 16th-century palazzo, where retail wine is artfully displayed and dozens of dining

tables have yards of space between them. Some nestle up against a stone fountain along a back wall. And below those tables, in the first-century foundations of the building, is a wine storage vault. At the end of a meal, if servers aren't too busy, they may be willing to show you. About the meal: it's a cold antipasti spread, but probably unlike any antipasti spread you've had: platters of vitello tonnato; beef roll-up's stuffed with herbs; turkey roll-ups showered with black truffle; roasted red and yellow peppers; mozzarella with porcini mushrooms. You point to what you want and an enormous plate — big enough to justify a price of about 25 euros (\$34 at \$1.36 to the euro) — is composed before you. You drink, linger and congratulate yourself for doing Friday dinner here. After Saturday lunch, Casa Blevé closes for a couple of days.

Saturday

9 a.m.

#### 4) SO MANY MASTERS

The [Galleria Borghese](#), in the Villa Borghese, which is like the Central Park of Rome, is as manageable and relaxing as the Vatican Museums can be sprawling and agitating. One reason is that it requires reservations (39-06-328-10, [www.galleriaborghese.it](http://www.galleriaborghese.it); admission 8.50 euros) — you smartly made one about four days before your visit — so the size of the crowd at any given moment is capped. And you can zip through the museum in an hour if you're determined. Its ratio of user-friendliness to artistic significance may be the most optimal in the world. On the first floor, a series of rooms largely devoted to sculpture, the attention-getting masterpiece is always in a room's center, so you can head straight to it. The Bernini sculptures are distributed so that they trace an arc of growing complexity: first his solitary "David," then the joined figures of "Apollo and Daphne," and finally his "Rape of Persephone," an entire violent scene in marble. Elsewhere in the museum are paintings by Titian, Rubens, Raphael and Caravaggio, whose work is especially well represented and particularly riveting.

11:30 a.m.

#### 5) BERNINI TURNS UP THE HEAT

Your Bernini appetite whetted, you need to see his most provocative work: the "Ecstasy of St. Teresa," a woman in a swoon that blurs all boundaries between the spiritual and, shall we say, corporal. It's in a classic Baroque church, [Santa Maria della Vittoria](#), that's slightly off the beaten track on Via XX Settembre — and is, thankfully, less crowded as a result. Be sure to get there before noon, when the church closes for several hours.

1:30 p.m.

#### 6) DOUGH ON THE GO

Committed lovers of pizza bianca — which is to say, anyone who's ever eaten pizza bianca — get it at [Antico Forno Roscioli](#), a bread and pizza shop near [Campo de' Fiori](#) (Via dei Chiavari, 34; 39-06-686-4045). Pizza bianca means white pizza and is really denuded pizza — like a firm, crispy focaccia gently kissed with oil, herbs and salt (1.40 euros for a snack-size portion). Take it into the [Piazza Farnese](#), which is just a block from the hubbub of Campo de' Fiori but a world away in terms of serenity. Sit a while on a stone bench outside the Palazzo Farnese, a Renaissance building made of yellow brick and designed by Michelangelo. Then find Via Giulia, on the opposite side of that building, and stroll down

perhaps the historic center's most beautiful residential street.

4:30 p.m.

#### 7) MUSSOLINI ON THE MARCH

Most tourists don't take excursions into [Italy's](#) Fascist past, but you do precisely that along a pretty stretch of the Tiber that's the setting for the Foro Italico, a series of sports arenas and sports-related artwork commissioned by Mussolini. A handsome marble stadium, the [Stadio dei Marmi](#), is ringed by statues of hyper-muscular athletes in poses of exaggerated physical vigor. Along with tens of thousands of square feet of pavement mosaic depicting both athletes and soldiers, they manage to provide a fascinating glimpse into Mussolini's grandiosity.

9 p.m.

#### 8) ALL IN THE FAMILY

Rome is a city where the most pleasurable, satisfying eating isn't at the high end; it's in restaurants with equal measures of sophistication and hominess. In other words, it's at [Trattoria Monti](#) (Via San Vito, 13; 39-06-446-6573), far enough from the center of the city to feel like a discovery but close enough to be easily accessible by cab. Walk inside and see two charismatic brothers, Enrico and Daniele Camerucci, handle a dozen or so tables with grace and ease. Their mother, Franca, is the cook, and she can be depended on for terrific pasta dishes (her tortellone with an egg-yolk center is a delicate marvel) and an amazing Parmesan custard of sorts, which the restaurant vaguely labels a tortino. No matter where on the menu you stray, it's hard to go wrong, and it's hard to spend more than 50 euros a person, including wine, for a meal worth more than that.

1:15 a.m.

#### 9) LA DOLCE FOUNTAIN

There are people who dismiss and deride the [Trevi Fountain](#) for representing what they deem the most garish, touristy dimension of Rome. These people are killjoys, and they probably didn't have the good sense to see the fountain late at night, even though Anita Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni pointed the way. That's when you show up, thrillingly unsettled by the way the fountain suddenly appeared around the corner, in a cramped crossroads, without any kind of drum roll. It is lighted, and the light creates sparkles in all that cascading water, which you can hear, because the hordes are gone. Just don't make like Ms. Ekberg in "La Dolce Vita" and take a dip. It's outlawed. The Trevi Fountain isn't the only monument that glows at night. So do the Coliseum and the Forum, which is best observed from the edge of the Campidoglio. In a city where clubbing isn't really the way to go, you can use darkness and midnight ramblings as a solution to midday crowds.

Sunday

9 a.m.

#### 10) KITTIES AND COLUMNS

To understand how promiscuously blessed with ancient relics Rome is and to appreciate how antiquity

pops up in unexpected crannies, visit [Largo Argentina](#). Fluted stone columns more than 2,000 years old rise from a patch of weeds and crumbling travertine pavement in the middle of a busy transportation nexus. They'd be a prime tourist draw in a lesser city; in Rome they're the central props in a stray cat sanctuary. You'll notice scores of cats: napping, sunning, grooming. You may also catch one of the women who care for them dropping off some lasagna.

10:30 a.m.

#### 11) FULL CIRCLE AT A DOME

You began with a dome, so you'll end with one. Not just any dome, but the most sublime and impressive dome of all: the [Pantheon](#). By now the other tourists are stirring, but the Pantheon, with a broad, open entrance and no ticket office, has a way of absorbing as many visitors as it must. So look up. Study the dome, made of poured concrete, and wonder how, in the second century, before crucial scientific and technological advances, a civilization could accomplish such a thing. It's the question behind so much in this monumental city, the right one to ask as you gather your bags.

#### VISITOR INFORMATION

[Leonardo da Vinci](#) (Fiumicino) Airport is about 20 miles from [Rome](#)'s historic center. Continental has round-trip flights from Newark and Delta offers service from Kennedy Airport. Fares offered on travel Web sites vary widely but are hard to find below \$550. The best way into the city is by shuttle train to the Termini station, a half-hour ride (9.50 euros, about \$13 at \$1.36 to the euro).

Walking is the best way to get around central Rome. The Metro costs one euro.

Hotel Forty Seven (Via Petroselli, 47; 39-06-678-7816; [www.hotelfortyseven.com](http://www.hotelfortyseven.com)), is relatively new; its 61 rooms provide modern amenities in the heart of historic Rome. It's near the Tiber, which provides a verdant buffer from crowds. Rooms start at around 350 euros.

[The Raphael](#) (Largo Febo, 2; 39-06-682-831; [www.raphaelhotel.com](http://www.raphaelhotel.com)) is covered in vines, loaded with Old World charm and tucked into the maze of streets near the Piazza Navona. Many of its 52 rooms are larger than you'd expect. Rooms start at about 300 euros.

The Hotel Santa Maria (Vicolo del Piede, 2; 39-06-589-4626; [www.htlsantamaria.com](http://www.htlsantamaria.com)) has 19 rooms in a 16th-century cloister in Trastevere, starting at about 165 euros.

*Frank Bruni, a former chief of the Rome bureau of The Times, is the Times restaurant critic.*

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