

The Eternal City: 48 Hours in Rome

The sights, sounds and smells that Rome offers visitors could satisfy for a lifetime, and while 48 hours will not do justice to the eternal city, ABC News has compiled a taste of things to do if you are only going to be there for a couple of days.

A Morning Stroll

Why not start your visit with a morning stroll around the Coliseum, site of countless gladiatorial battles, executions and animal hunts? The amphitheatre was built in A.D. 72 and could hold as many as 50,000 spectators. Thousands still flock to the site centuries after it was built. Modern day gladiators strut around the outside, ready to pose for tourists.

Just next to the Coliseum is the Forum, the former center of the Roman Empire, and the site of Julius Caesar's assassination on the ides of March in the year 44 B.C. It was home to the senate, the most major judicial and religious buildings and was also the ancient capital's trade center. As the empire grew, so did the Forum and the monuments dedicated to victorious generals and heralded emperors. Now, the remains of several significant temples flank the ancient roads, and large ornate triumphal arches mark the entrances to the Forum.

A lunch time break

From the Forum it is a short walk to the hilly district of Monti -- a perfect spot for some light lunch.

Afternoon sightseeing or siesta?

Depending on the pace at which you travel, now might be the perfect time for a quick nap back at the hotel; or if you are in an energetic mood, the Domus Aurea is nearby.

The Domus Aurea (or Golden Palace) was the notorious Roman Emperor Nero's party palace. It was built in opulent style after the Great Fire of Rome -- for which Nero was rumored to have been responsible. Entire

rooms and corridors of the palace were decorated with gold leaf, hence the name. Recent discoveries on the site show that it housed the world's first ever revolving restaurant -- a remarkable engineering feat for the 1st century. Much of it has not yet been excavated, but what has is impressive and indicative of Nero's extravagance.

An evening drink:

Stroll over to Campo dei Fiori for a traditional aperitivo, or pre dinner drink. Most evenings, young locals flock on their mopeds to the wine bars in this central square. Originally, the city's flower market, fruit, vegetables and flowers are still sold here during the day but the place really comes alive at night. During the summer, hundreds of pouting Romans fill the square drinking, smoking and snacking.

From there you can try a walk across the Tiber River through the Piazza Farnese and along Via Julia to Trastevere for dinner. If you're not yet hungry, you could stop off for another drink at another picturesque square – Piazza Santa Maria in Trastevere, but if you are in the mood for food, there are endless trattorias, pizzerias and ristoranti here. A classic Roman dining experience can be had at Da Ivo, on Via San Francesco di Ripa. There are also a plethora of late night bars in the area.

Day Two -- Centro Storico:

Awake to a cappuccino and cornetto (an Italian version of a croissant) to fortify yourself before a heavy day of sightseeing. First, stop at the Pantheon -- one of the world's most important architectural gems, described by Michelangelo as of "angelic and not human design." The design of the Pantheon's awe-inspiring dome was, centuries later, the inspiration for Brunelleschi's dome in the Florence Cathedral in Italy.

It was built by the Roman Emperor Hadrian in the 1st century as a temple dedicated to all gods, and was later reincarnated as a church, and is now a tomb, holding, among others, two Italian kings.

Piazza Navona is only a short walk from the Pantheon and is home to the world famous Bernini fountain, Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi (Fountain of the Four Rivers). The piazza is a perfect place for (albeit overpriced) pre-lunch beer and people-watching sessions.

Lunchtime:

Just around the corner is the picturesque Piazza del Fico, which is shrouded by the eponymous fig tree and also home to another Roman institution, Da Francesco. A traditional Roman trattoria -- the service here is fast and simple, as is the food, but both are equally charming.

From here you can walk off your lunch and head toward the Vatican museums on the other side of the river Tiber. Official guided tours are offered by the Vatican and will help the uninitiated navigate through the myriad paintings, sculptures, maps and statues on display here.

But the highlight of any visit to the Vatican would have to be the legendary Sistine Chapel, site of the Papal conclaves. The chapel was closed for 10 years while restorers worked on the intricate design of Michelangelo's famed ceiling, and after its 1994 reopening, has seen countless visitors.

But a trip to the Vatican would not be possible without a visit to the magnificent St. Peter's Basilica, the mother church of Catholicism, which houses the tomb of St Peter -- the first-ever pope.

Best way to end a trip?

Rome is a mecca for gastronomes and if you are one, why not complete your trip with one of the best meals ever? Quinzi and Gabrieli, on Via delle Coppelle, is famed for its fish and is worthy of its reputation. The spaghetti lobster pulls in smart Roman crowds from Tuesday to Saturday, and in the summer, diners can sit in the flanking courtyard under the stars. Buon Appetito!