

# Roma - A guide to some of my favorite places

by Jeff Curto

*“If Rome were a meal, or a book, or a woman, or a wrinkled, wise and ancient face, it would be the only face worth studying, the only woman worth loving, the only book worth reading, the only meal worth eating. You must go and go and go again.”* –Anon.

Roma is an astonishing city... Crowded, noisy, bustling, gorgeous, and just generally fabulous.

It's a great walking city, and, while you can't ever see "all" of it, you really can see much of what you would want to see by just hoofing it. Even if you're just walking through stuff that isn't in the guidebooks, it's fun to see the places Romans go and eat and shop, etc.

The annotated map included in this document is intended to go along with the text below. I've put some markers in for some of my favorite spots, and then numbered them. Most of them are in my favorite neighborhood in Rome, which is the Centro Storico or "historic center."

It has a wonderful mix of Baroque, Renaissance and Ancient Rome, with the Piazza Navona, the Pantheon and some wonderful churches from various eras. The Pantheon is probably my favorite building in the world. It's an amazing structure that has been in continuous use since Agrippa erected it in 27BC. Go in and stand directly under the oculus that is in the center of the dome and look up.

In front of the temple, the piazza centers on Giacomo della Porta's late-Renaissance fountain and an Egyptian obelisk added in the 18th century. The cafes around the piazza are fun to sit in for a drink. As with everywhere in Italy, you'll pay for the privilege of sitting down (standing at a bar is always cheaper) but it's nice to sit and have a glass of wine and watch as the sun sets on a building that's 2000 years old.

If you're standing facing the Pantheon, off to the left side is a wonderful little pizzeria, "**Pizzeria Minerva**" where you can get a slice of Roman pizza and a cold beer. You can sit inside or, better, carry it out and sit on the steps of the fountain in the piazza and eat lunch the way Romans eat it; on the run. I've marked that with a **number 1**.

Around the left side of the Pantheon, sort of behind it, another obelisk (on the back of an elephant!) marks the center of Piazza Minerva. Behind the obelisk, the Chiesa di Santa Maria sopra Minerva hides some Renaissance masterpieces, including Michelangelo's Christ Bearing the Cross, an Annunciation by Antoniazio Romano, and a statue of St. Sebastian recently attributed to Michelangelo.

If you turn your back on the Pantheon and walk away from it, taking the righthand choice of the two possible ways, you'll pass the second-best (Jeff's opinion) gelateria in Rome, Della Palma. It's a modern iteration of Rome's obsession with ice cream. Continue on about 100 yards and take a right on via Uffici del Vicario and you'll come to the Mother of all Roman Gelaterias, **Giolitti**. This place has been around since 1900. Go at night, preferably after 10:00 or 11:00. Pay for your ice cream at the front counter (most bars – of any sort – in Italy have you pay for your order before you order it from the barista) and then elbow your way through the crowd to the most amazing display of gelati anywhere. Order up from the barista (get "panna" or whipped cream applied in a slab-like fashion to the side of the cone) and enjoy. I've marked it with a **number 2**.

Important: If you are ever starting to be tired or having a bad time in Italy, have a gelato. Everything gets better after that.

The Piazza Navona isn't too far from the Pantheon; it's a great people watching place and the home of some amazing sculptural fountains by Bernini, including the "Quattro Fiume" or "Four Rivers" which dominates the center. The piazza itself is in the shape of an old amphitheater.

Walking north out of the piazza and a bit east, you will find the **Church of San Luigi dei Francesi** at Via Santa Giovanna d'Arco 5. This is my very favorite art experience in Roma. This church is the seat of French Catholicism in Roma, and is home to three of Caravaggio's most famous paintings, including The Calling of St. Matthew. Open F-W 7:30am-12:30pm and 3:30-7pm, Th 7:30am-12:30pm.). Go in and go down the left aisle all the way to the front of the church. Put a Euro (pronounced "Oooo-roh" by the Italians, by the way, not "Yur-oh") coin into the box on the front wall and you'll get a few minutes of illumination of one of the greatest paintings of the Baroque. Not only that, but you'll be among just a handful of people who will visit the church that day. I've marked this with a **number 3**.

If you walk south out of the Piazza Navona, you will come to the Campo di Fiore. Fiore is “flower” in Italian and if you go there in the morning, you will be treated to an amazing display of fresh flowers from vendors who set up there in the morning hours. At night, there are some great bars and fun restaurants.

A couple of nice places for dinner are near the Pantheon.

One is my favorite, a place called “**Il Buco**” (literally translated to be “the hole” but it really means “the mouth”). I’ve marked that with a **number 4**; it’s at Via Sant’Ignazio, 8.

Marked with a **number 5** is **Pizzeria La Sacrestia**, at Seminario, 89, which is very near the Pantheon. It’s a great place for a pizza, but also for a more hearty meal. A bit farther down (away from the Pantheon) the same street is another nice, modest place called Due Colonne.

One last Roman suggestion, both for dinner and for the fun of it is to visit the Jewish Ghetto neighborhood. In old (not ancient) Rome, Jews used to be locked up at night in a section of the city. Therefore, there is a neighborhood that has kept the traditions of old Jewish Rome (Judaism being Italy’s second most popular religion). There is a restaurant there called **Trattoria Giggetto** at Via del Portico d’Ottavio 2 (marked with a **number 6**). Eat outside if the weather is nice enough, and you’ll be eating under the “Portico d’ Ottavia” or Portal of Octavius, one of Rome’s emperors. For antipasti (starters) you should order “carciofi alla giudea” and you’ll have a deep-fried artichoke that is amazingly wonderful. If you order “baccala” you’ll have fried cod, also scrumptious. Both are old Roman-Jewish specialties, and are enjoyed by few Roman tourists and both are also astonishingly good.

Relax; don’t try to see everything and have fun!



Has something changed in the Eternal City, making this document obsolete? If so, let me know by writing me at:

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