

La Dolce Vita:

# Two Days in Rome

*La Dolce Vita* (the Sweet Life): it's decadent and shallow but boy, is it fun. Overused but apt, *dolce vita* describes Rome's taste for pure hedonism – a penchant since crowds roared for blood at the Colosseum.

Fellini's chic monochrome film gave us the phrase (as well as the word *paparazzi*, from annoying celebrity photographer Paparazzo). The city is the film's biggest star, and you can visit Fellini's haunts and taste Rome's contemporary *dolce vita* with this two-day sweetener.

## ROMPING WITH SYLVIA

You first spot **St Peter's Dome & Piazza** (Piazza San Pietro; [www.stpetersbasilica.org](http://www.stpetersbasilica.org)) in the film as Marcello and friends soar overhead with a helicopter-borne statue of Christ. Later Anita Ekberg's character Sylvia visits, running impishly up the dome's narrow staircase. She writes her name on the wall, but you might not find it because Fellini reproduced the set at Cinecittà.

The huge piazza (1656-67), embraced by 88-column colonnades and topped by 140 saints, was designed by Bernini. He wanted to surprise visitors as they escaped the surrounding medieval jumble (an effect Mussolini spoiled by bulldozing huge approach Via della Conciliazione). You can also walk up the Michelangelo-designed dome. When Sylvia asks Marcello how high it is he answers 'very, very high'; it's actually 119m, with 550 steps to the top. A lift takes you halfway, which is where Sylvia's hat flew off in a gust of wind.

If you haven't brought your convertible, hop on the Metro to Flaminio. This will land you at **Piazza del Popolo**, a vast open oval. This is where Marcello chatted with jaded shade-wearing Baroness Maddelena. On the corner is **Dal Bolognese** (Piazza del Popolo 1, closed

Monday), where today's beautiful people hang out. Stop for lunch and a pose if you're in the mood. Or, paparazzi-style, head to celebrity favourite **Hotel de Russie** (Via del Babuino 9; [www.hotelderussie.it](http://www.hotelderussie.it)) – recent guests include George Clooney and Brad Pitt.

Next wander through **Tridente**, elegant grids of streets lined with designer boutiques. Drop by to pay tribute to the director in gallery-lined **Via Margutta**. He lived at No 110. But **Via Condotti** is the main drag and perfect for seeing and being seen. You can stop at **Caffè Greco** (Via Condotti 86), all red flock, penguin waiters and fin-de-siècle decadence.

Your next appointment is **Via Vittorio Veneto**, *Dolce Vita* heartland. Here the It crowd frolicked, flirted and wandered in the evening *passeggiata*, focused on the **Café de Paris** at No 90. Today it's full of overpriced glass-covered cafes trading on its past. Fellini didn't film here – trainspotters note that in the film the street is flat; in reality it's quite clearly a hill. For the contemporary equivalent, get dressed up and dally around **Trastevere** after dark.

One of cinema's iconic moments is Sylvia's romp in the **Fontana di Trevi**. It's unsurprising that she was so struck by the fountain, designed by Nicola Salvi in 1732 – it's frothy and fabulous, and fills the entire piazza. Don't hop in yourself though – it's illegal. You'll have to content yourself with tossing in a coin, which apparently ensures you a return visit to Rome. On an average day €1500 gets thrown in. No wonder Rome is crowded.

Spend your evening in the deeply hip *centro storico*. Sufficiently dressed to the nines (strapless evening gowns optional), dine at **Supperclub** (Via de' Nari 14;

La Dolce Vita:

# Two Days in Rome



[www.it.supperclub.com](http://www.it.supperclub.com)), reclining on white divans, serenaded by violins. Next take in tiny theatrical bar **Baronato Quattro Bellezze** (Via di Panico 23), where on a Thursday the owner dons drag to sing Piaf. Finally, shake your thing at **La Maison** (Vicolo dei Granari 4), for cherubs, chandeliers and very good-looking folk.

## ARISTOCRATS & MONSTERS

Today start at **Terme di Caracalla** (Viale delle Terme di Caracalla 52; closed Monday). These incredible 10-hectare ruins were where Fellini set his neon- and candlelit Caracallas nightclub. In more ancient times they held up to 1600 splashy citizens. It's never been a nightclub, but does host summer opera.

From here it's an easy journey to **Appia Antica**, the ancient road Marcello and Sylvia take from the airport. You'll have doubtless noted **Cecilia Metella** – an ancient roadside tomb – in the film and you can eat at the nearby eponymous **restaurant** (Via Appia Antica 125-127) with its bucolic countryside views.

After lunch you'll need to pop out of town to **Tivoli**. Here is the extravagant pleasure palace **Villa d'Este** (Piazza Trento; closed Monday) which represented Bassano di Sutri in the film; Marcello attended a decadent aristocratic party here. You can relive their ghost hunt, weaving in and out of the topiary in the marvellous formal gardens – for true authenticity affect seen-it-all cynicism and pack your candelabra.

In the film's finale, Marcello and co find a sea monster on the beach. This is the finale of this itinerary too (monsters excluded). You'll need to head to the once-glamorous seaside resort of **Fregene**, about an hour south, one of the few places Fellini filmed on location. Today it's more built up, but still evokes the film's final windswept scene. In summer, you can stay on to dance

on the beach (preferably barefoot and in a ballgown) – several clubs shift here during the hot season.

## SLEEPING

### Budget:

Hotel Panda ([www.hotelpanda.it](http://www.hotelpanda.it); ☎ 06 678 01 79) Charming pension slap-bang in the centre of designer-heaven Tridente.

### Midrange:

Locarno ([www.hotellocarno.com](http://www.hotellocarno.com); ☎ 06 361 08 41) Art Deco pad from another era in the Tridente, with genteel and welcoming staff to match.

### Top end:

Hotel de Russie ([www.roccofortehotels.com](http://www.roccofortehotels.com); ☎ 06 328 881) Where else but the de Russie? Celebrity favourite, with divine terraced gardens.

For more reviews of Rome accommodation, check out the Sleep section on [www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation](http://www.lonelyplanet.com/accommodation).

By Abigail Hole

For the complete guide to Rome grab a copy of Lonely Planet's *Rome* guide; or get right under the skin of the city with *Best of Rome*. Both books are available online at [shop.lonelyplanet.com](http://shop.lonelyplanet.com).

