

# Rome & Lazio



All roads lead to Rome. And once arrived, travellers may just as well echo Julius Caesar at the Rubicon and acknowledge that the die is cast – for this city gets into the bloodstream like no other, making future visits inevitable.

The Romans left town to conquer and populate territories as far-flung as Spain and Syria, but everyone else has done the reverse. Rome was the apogee of the Grand Tour, the city that beckoned the European nobility before the days of mass travel and won the hearts of jet-setting Americans in the 1950s and '60s. It was here that Nero fiddled, Napoleon strutted and Anita Ekberg famously frolicked. It's one hell of a town.

In many ways, Marcello Mastroianni's character in Fellini's *La dolce vita* (The Sweet Life) got it right when he said, 'I adore Rome; it's a sort of jungle'. The chaotic traffic and street noise, extremes of wealth and poverty, and contradiction between Catholic conservatism and big-city hedonism make for an intoxicating mix – one that can sometimes be overwhelming. When this happens, the best antidote is to spend a day out of town. Lazio is blessed with an abundance of historical towns and sites, some lovely beaches and many places of religious significance – there's sure to be somewhere that tickles your fancy.

So, do as the Romans do – seize the day by throwing yourself wholeheartedly into the life of the city. Walk the cobbled streets and teeming boulevards, drink too much coffee and wine, eat a surfeit of pasta and gelato, and shop the streets around the Piazza di Spagna till you drop. After all, that's what *la dolce vita* is all about.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Be overwhelmed by the grandeur of **St Peter's Basilica** (p124) and the **Vatican Museums** (p125)
- Dream of ancient glories at the **Roman Forum** (p109), **Palatine** (p108) and **Colosseum** (p107)
- See how ancient Roman villas were decorated at the **Museo Nazionale Romano: Palazzo Massimo alle Terme** (p120)
- Rhapsodise over the Renaissance artworks at the **Museo e Galleria Borghese** (p119) and **Galleria Doria Pamphilj** (p113)
- Do as Hadrian did and escape to the charming town of **Tivoli** (p173)



■ POPULATION: Rome city 2.6 million;  
Lazio 5.2 million

■ AREA: Lazio 17,202 sq km

# ROME

## HISTORY

Rome's origins date to that nether period when myth had not yet become history. The story of the she-wolf suckling Romulus and Remus is a nice legend, but few historians accept it as historical fact. What they do acknowledge is that Romulus became the first king of Rome (Roma) on 21 April 753 BC and that the city was an amalgamation of Etruscan, Latin and Sabine settlements on the Palatine (Palatino), Esquiline (Esquilino) and Quirinal (Quirinale) Hills. Archaeological discoveries have confirmed the existence of a settlement on the Palatine in that period.

The Roman Republic was founded in 509 BC and was the major power in the Western world until internal rivalries led to civil war. Julius Caesar went to war with his erstwhile partner Pompey, leaving Mark Antony and Octavian to fight for the top job after Caesar was murdered in 44 BC. Octavian prevailed and, with the blessing of the Senate, became Augustus, the first Roman emperor.

One of the more sensible Roman emperors, he ruled well and the city enjoyed a period of political stability and artistic achievement. Successive rulers such as Tiberius, Caligula and Nero, as well as events such as the Great Fire of AD 64, combined to leave Rome in tatters, but the city bounced back. By 100, it had a population of 1.5 million and was the undisputed *Caput Mundi* (Capital of the World). But it couldn't last and when, in 330, Constantine moved his power base to Byzantium, Rome's glory days were numbered. In 455 it was routed by the Vandals and in 476 the last emperor of the Western Roman Empire, Romulus Augustulus, was deposed.

By now Rome's Christian roots had taken firm hold. Christianity had been spreading since the 1st century AD thanks to the underground efforts of apostles Peter and Paul and under Constantine it received official recognition. Pope Gregory I (590–604) did much to strengthen the Church's grip over the city and, in 774, Rome's place as centre of the Christian world was cemented when Pope Leo III crowned Charlemagne as Holy Roman Emperor.

The medieval period was marked by continuous fighting by just about anyone capable of raising an army. In the thick of things, the

Papal States fought their corner as ruthlessly as anyone.

In 1309, however, Pope Clement V decided enough was enough and upped sticks to Avignon, leaving the powerful Colonna and Orsini families to contest control of the city. Once the waters had calmed, Pope Gregory XI returned to Rome in 1377 and, finding the city close to ruins, set up home in the fortified Vatican.

Out of the ruins grew the Rome of the Renaissance. At the behest of the great papal dynasties – the Barberini, Farnese and Pamphilj among others – the leading artists of the 15th and 16th centuries were summoned to work on projects such as the Sistine Chapel and St Peter's Basilica. But the enemy was never far away, and in 1527 Pope Clement VII took refuge in Castel Sant'Angelo as Charles V's Spanish forces ransacked Rome.

Once again Rome needed rebuilding and it was to the 17th-century baroque masters Bernini and Borromini that the city's patrons turned. With their exuberant churches, fountains and *palazzi* (mansions), these two bitter rivals changed the face of the city. The building boom following the unification of Italy and the declaration of Rome as its capital also profoundly influenced the look of the city, as did Mussolini and hasty post-WWII expansion.

## ORIENTATION

Rome is a sprawling city, but most sights lie within the *centro storico* (historical centre; comprising the areas around the Piazza Navona, Campo de' Fiori, Pantheon, Ghetto, Capitoline, Piazza Barberini, Trevi and Tridente). Vatican City and Trastevere are over the water on the west bank of the Tiber. Distances are not huge and walking is the best way to get around the city.

The city's major transport hub, Stazione Termini (its full name is Stazione Centrale-Roma Termini) is a useful, if unattractive, point of reference. The majority of the city's budget hotels and *pensioni* (small hotels or guesthouses) are in this area and the main city bus terminus is on Piazza Cinquecento, in front of the train station.

From Piazza Cinquecento, Via Cavour leads directly down to the Roman Forum, while from Piazza della Repubblica, a short walk to the west of Stazione Termini, Via Nazionale heads down towards Piazza Venezia.