Viator Insider’s Guide
Rome

THE TOP ATTRACTIONS, TIPS, & THE BEST THINGS TO SEE AND DO
Rome has earned its ancient nickname of The Eternal City – no matter how many places in Italy vie for our attention, there’s no city that compares to Rome. Here you can walk the same streets that Caesar once walked, then turn a corner to see how modern Romans live alongside the city’s historic splendor.

The vastness of Rome encompasses everything from the epicenter of the once-mighty Roman Empire to the smallest independent nation on earth – but this city won’t truly grab your heart until you get past the must-see list and dig a little deeper into its neighborhoods. Watch artisans at work, sit with locals enjoying their afternoon coffee, and explore the cracks between the attractions. That’s where the charm lies.

In this guide we’ll show you the best ways to scratch below the surface and get to know this complex city – so you can travel like an insider in Rome!

Meet the Insiders

Jessica learned to love Rome after initially finding it overwhelming, thanks in large part to taking it slowly and making repeated visits to her favorite building in the city – the Pantheon.

Blanca focuses on Italy as Product Sales Director for EMEA. Her best tip: stick with the locals and you’ll taste the most authentic food and have the best experience.
Exclusive Access

Best Way to See the Vatican: Like a VIP

For the world’s smallest country, Vatican City has one of the most popular attractions within Rome – the Sistine Chapel. Normally, you’re stuck seeing Michelangelo’s heavenly frescoes while standing elbow-to-elbow with hundreds of other visitors. With a VIP tour of the Vatican, however, you get private time in the Sistine Chapel to truly appreciate this sacred space.

The tour includes “secret rooms” which most tourists never get to see and concludes with an after-hours visit to the Sistine Chapel, allowing you to experience its grandeur completely empty except for your small tour group.

“This was absolutely a once-in-a-lifetime experience! The quiet time spent in the Sistine Chapel was incredible.”

-Martha L.
Vatican Experiences

Best for: Small Groups

Every skip-the-line tour gives you priority access, but not all of them give you personalized attention. This small group tour of the Vatican ensures that you not only get to waltz past the lines at the museum entry, your group is limited to no more than 12 people. In a small group, your guide will have time to address your questions and interests. Plus, you’ll be at the Vatican Museums first thing in the morning to beat the heat and the crowds.

Best for: Flexible Scheduling

Despite the wisdom in early-morning visits to the Vatican Museums to avoid crowds, not everyone is an early riser – especially when we’re on vacation and supposed to be relaxing. This skip-the-line Vatican walking tour has several departure options to choose from that will suit any schedule. During this three-hour tour, you’ll see the Vatican Museums, Sistine Chapel, and St. Peter’s Basilica – and this tour includes priority access, letting you sleep in and still avoid lines.

Best for: Most Comprehensive

The highlights of Vatican City can be seen in a few hours, but there are three Vatican Basilicas elsewhere in Rome, too. Leave the logistical planning to your expert guide on a Vatican in One Day tour, during which you’ll see the Basilicas of Santa Maria Maggiore, St. John Lateran, and St. Paul in Rome – plus you’ll get a walking tour of the Vatican Museums, Sistine Chapel, and St. Peter’s Basilica within Vatican City. It’s the most comprehensive Vatican tour, and ensures you see everything in one well-organized day.
As any visitor to Rome will notice after mere seconds in the historic city center, ancient Rome is everywhere you look. The ruins of the empire, although they’re sometimes half-buried, still loom over the modern landscape like they’re not quite ready to concede defeat. It’s all very awe-inspiring, but it’s still hard to imagine what life was like for the people who built those monuments.

Not so in Pompeii, where the big city is still laid out as it was 2,000 years ago, somewhat frozen in time by the blast of Mt. Vesuvius. A day trip from Rome to Pompeii lets you dive deeper into ancient Rome, putting it into the context of modern Rome, and modern Italy.

Insider’s Tip
Pompeii is the more famous city buried by Vesuvius, but it’s not the only one. Don’t miss a visit to nearby Herculaneum – just a short train ride from Pompeii – which is a smaller excavated site, but in an even better state of preservation.
Learn

**Best Lesson You Can Use at Home:** Italian Cooking Classes

In modern usage, the word “souvenir” typically means something that we bring back from a trip to help us remember a place. The French word, however, is more about a memory than an object – and, as we all know, memories don’t gather dust on bookshelves.

Take a [cooking class in Rome](#) – learn to [make gelato](#) or [craft a multi-course meal after a visit to a traditional market](#). There are even classes geared toward [getting your kids involved in the cooking process](#). You’ll make lasting memories and gain new skills. It’s the kind of souvenir you’ll use over and over again – and it won’t add any extra weight to your suitcase, either.

“**I can’t believe how much I learned! I’m planning an Italian dinner party soon to show off my new skills.**”

-Sherry R.
Best Culinary Experience: Eat Like a Local

Italians are notoriously proud of their cuisine, but Rome – like any big tourist city – has plenty of mediocre food alongside the truly great stuff. It can be hard to tell the difference if you don’t know what to look for, which is why it’s a good idea to take a food tour of Rome early in your trip.

Learn about the unique foods of Rome’s Jewish Ghetto and Trastevere. Focus on the best places to find authentic Roman pizza. You can also take a food walking tour of Rome that will leave you with insider info on the best places to eat in the capital – handy knowledge for the rest of your stay. And if you’d rather drink your meals, sign up for a wine tasting in Rome.

Insider’s Tip

The best food in Rome and throughout Italy is made with seasonal ingredients. To find out what’s in season when you visit, find an outdoor food market. You don’t need to buy anything, just check out what seems to be the most common vegetables, fish, and cheeses for sale. Then look for those names on menus when you’re ordering lunch.
Best Tours for Kids: Interactive Experiences in Rome

If you think it’s hard for you to wrap your head around more than 2,000 years of history, imagine what it’s like for your kids. You don’t want them to look back on their trip to Rome as the one where they suffered through one boring museum after another just to get another scoop of gelato. Luckily, there are family-friendly tours in Rome that put your kids first.

Take a tour of ancient Rome with a guide specializing in children, and everyone gets to learn something the fun way. Get them into an Italian kitchen and they’ll be begging you to let them making authentic Roman pizza at home. Sign the kids up for Roman Gladiator School and you may just win their coveted parent of the year award.

"My kids thought the Gladiator School was the best part of our trip. They still talk about it today." - Gabe S.
Best Way to See the Colosseum: Behind the Scenes and Before the Crowds

The Colosseum in Rome was the largest amphitheater ever built by the ancient Romans, and despite centuries of being used as a quarry, it remains one of Italy’s most iconic symbols. In 2011, a massive restoration project to clean up and stabilize the Colosseum began, and it’s slated to be completed in 2016. In other words, the old arena hasn’t looked better in almost 2,000 years.

Get a more in-depth look at the ancient monument with a tour of the Colosseum’s underground chambers and upper tier, including parts of the amphitheater that are typically off-limits to tourists. The tour then proceeds to the nearby Roman Forum and Palatine Hill. You’ll enjoy skip-the-line access at Rome’s top attractions, and the valuable insights of an expert guide.

Insider’s Tip
If you’re planning to visit the Colosseum along with the Forum and Palatine Hill, book a skip-the-line tour or plan to visit Palatine Hill first and get a combined pass that includes all three attractions. The ticket line at Palatine Hill is always shorter than the one at the Colosseum.
Some of the Best Roman Ruins Aren’t in Rome

As big as Rome is, and as chock-full of world-famous ancient ruins, there’s even more to see if you leave the historic city center. In fact, there are several ancient Roman ruins worth visiting that are easy day trips from Rome. Two UNESCO World Heritage Sites are in nearby Tivoli.

The excavated remains of the former home of 2nd century Emperor Hadrian and the stunning gardens of Villa d’Este make a grand combined day trip. See the 30-plus excavated buildings of Hadrian’s Villa - large enough to be considered a small town, with palaces, temples, theaters, and libraries. The beautiful Renaissance gardens at Villa d’Este, built in the late 16th century, abound with fountains and water features that are lovely to behold today and were incredible feats of engineering at the time.

Even closer to the city is the historic port of Ostia Antica, where you can explore the well-maintained ruins of Rome’s former port city.
Best Unusual Attraction:  
The Catacombs  
For a unique look at Rome’s past, you have to go underground – into the Roman Catacombs, the ancient cemeteries. There’s a vast network of tunnels under the city, which can’t be explored without a guide (you really don’t want to get lost). To continue the theme, take a tour of the Roman Catacombs combined with crypts underneath two churches – including the Capuchin Crypt, decorated with the bones of thousands of monks.

Best Romantic Experience:  
Dinner with a Colosseum View  
For the ultimate romantic evening in Rome you need a view of the city’s most famous monument. With a rooftop dinner in Rome and a Colosseum night tour, you’re in for a truly memorable evening. Enjoy a four-course meal on a terrace overlooking the Colosseum after an introductory historic overview from a guide (while you sip prosecco, of course). After dinner, join your guide for an exclusive night tour of the Forum and the Colosseum, including the underground chambers.

Best Museum for Art Lovers:  
The Borghese Gallery  
Rome has much to satisfy the art lover, from the immense collections of the Vatican Museums to the modern masterpieces at MAXXI. The museum that no art lover in Rome should miss, however, is the Borghese Gallery. This former villa houses work by Caravaggio, Raphael, Titian, and Bernini (among others). With a skip-the-line tour of the Borghese Gallery and Gardens you won’t miss a thing – and you’ll avoid the often-long lines.
Best Way to See it All: Hop-On, Hop-Off Bus Tours

Rome is a huge city, and the historic center is full of famous sights. To get a handle on the layout of the city, take a hop-on hop-off bus tour in Rome at the start of your visit. You’ll see the layers of history spreading out from the center, and can jump off at any time to explore further. Combine that overview with walking tours of ancient Rome and the best of modern Rome for a comprehensive understanding of the Italian capital.

Best Unique Transportation: A Vintage Fiat

Sightseeing in a vintage Fiat 500 adds an especially Italian flair to your visit. There are multiple itineraries to choose from, so you’ll see just what interests you. And don’t worry about negotiating Roman traffic – you get to relax while your local guide chauffeurs you through the city, including some hidden sights most visitors miss. For a more open-air experience, hop on the back of a Vespa for a tour of Rome.

Best Active Adventure: Biking in Rome

There are lots of good reasons to take a bike tour of Rome. You’ll cover more ground than you would on foot, allowing you to see more in a day. You’ll get away from the crowds and see a different side of Rome. Plus, you’ll have the perfect justification for another helping of gelato or pizza. If running is more your thing, sign up for a small-group running tour of Rome. Not in the mood for so much exercise? Try a instead.
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