



WHEN IN ROME

Offering everything from classic gems to hidden delights, Rome is the perfect holiday escape this October. Editor **Danae Mercer** explores the timeless city

View of Castel Sant'Angelo

DAY ONE

Morning

Rome in the afternoon is a city filled with the excited buzz of holidaymakers, the hum of Italian words, and the scents of warm bread spilling out of open-door restaurants. But in the morning, it's a different world. The city waits, quiet, stoic, with its impressive buildings and empty streets together giving a feeling of a place that has withstood all time. To capture this atmosphere, I grab a sharp espresso and leave Jumeirah Grand Hotel Via Veneto by 6am.

I walk to Via Leone IV, a street near the Vatican. There I meet with a private tour guide arranged by Pure Entertainment Group, a group who coordinate bespoke luxury travel services. I am early but already the guide is rushing me towards the Vatican. "It gets busy quickly," he explains. "To be the first ones, that's the secret." As we wait for the doors to open, the guide uses props and images to explain what we will see inside. "I cannot speak in the Sistine Chapel," he notes.

By 7:30am, the doors swing open and we are in. Immediately my guide marches me to the Sistine Chapel. We arrive into a largely empty space, creating the feeling of a private viewing of Michelangelo's greatest work. The guide points out Adam's eyes ("You can't see them from here, but on webcam images available online you can. Adam's eyes are completely white. He's blind.") and the painted pages of books ("They are blank, which means in the painting, the judgement hasn't started yet"). Over the next few hours, the guide walks me through the numerous halls and histories of the Vatican and St. Peter's Basilica with similar expertise. "What we can see here is just a drop not in the water, but in the ocean, of what the Vatican actually holds," he notes.

After walking through the Vatican's little-discussed modern art collection and out into Rome's sunshine, the guide turns to me. "One thing to be sure of: never, ever buy a ticket from the 'skip the queue' sellers outside here. They are absolutely fake. You will lose your money." Instead, pre-book through a tour concierge. Individual tours of the Vatican are also available for an additional cost.

Afternoon

I make my way across the city towards the Coliseum. After a scoop of gelato in one of the neighbouring roadside cafés, I meet Alvis Di Giulio, an energetic tour guide who focuses on seeing hidden gems in vintage Fiats (rome-500exp.com). With the windows down and the skylight open ("Old-fashioned air conditioning!" Laughs Giulio), it's easy to feel the bustling energy of Rome.

We drive to Aventine Hill, which Giulio calls a hidden village that tourists never come to. Historically portrayed as working class, Aventine Hill is now a wealthy residential area consisting of refined architecture, the Basilica of Santa Sabina, the Rome Rose Garden, and numerous palaces.

Next comes Savello Park and the Garden of the Oranges, "one of the most romantic places in the world." Today a sleepy vantage point from which to see all of Rome while standing under the shade of towering orange trees, the park previously served as a fortress and a monastery. Giulio walks me to a fountain gushing cold water. "The locals always drink this," he says, filling up our bottles. "But the best way is to hold the spout." Giulio demonstrates and the water changes direction, shooting up like a drinking faucet.

A short walk away is Basilica di Santa Sabina, the oldest existing Roman basilica that maintains its original style. Like the Garden of Oranges, Santa Sabina is nearly entirely empty, creating a feeling of serenity within its looming columns.

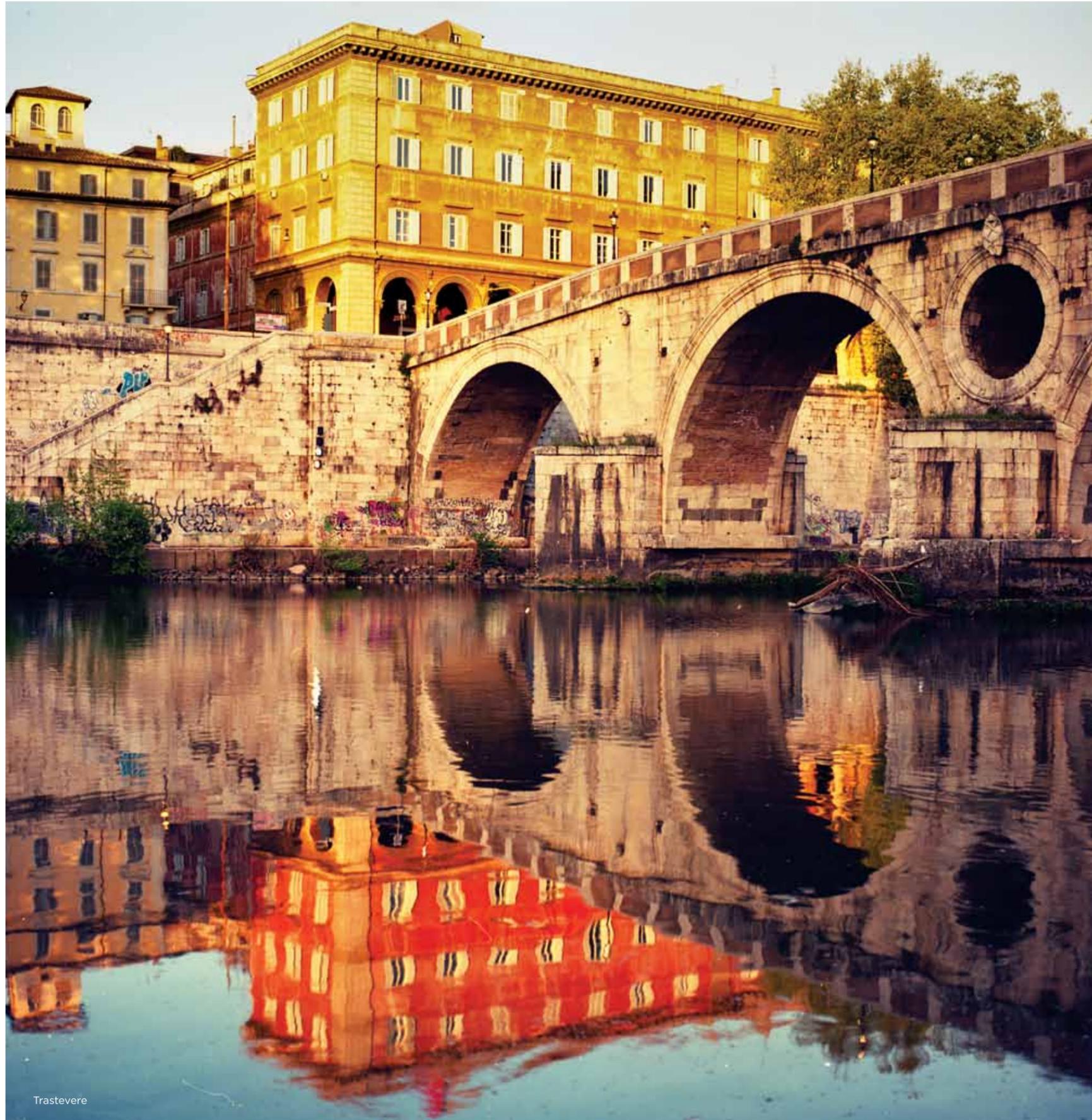




Via Giulia



Trastevere



Trastevere

An insider recommends

Diego Spera, Lifestyle Coordinator, Jumeirah Grand Hotel Via Veneto

Rome is one of those cities where you could spend a life and still be able to see something new.

If you're here on holiday, I would recommend going off the beaten track. People tend to enjoy going to the city centre, where there are a lot of landmarks I love. But what I love the most isn't a square or a sculpture. It's Via Giulia, a street in the historic part of Rome. There's nothing specific to see, but I tell people to go there first, and they tend to think it's just beautiful. It captures the atmosphere of Rome. I know it sounds a bit poetic, but it's like that.

I also recommend the Trastevere area. This part of Rome used to be very working class, very much for the masses. Now it's quite posh. It once was cheap and chic, but it's no longer cheap at all. It's amazing. In the summer it's one of the best spots. The entire area is filled with people, with locals in bars and clubs, sat in restaurants, eating, drinking. It's very alive.

Via Veneto itself is also nice. It's a historic street that has been featured in many popular films.

For more information on Jumeirah Grand Hotel Via Veneto, visit jumeirah.com, or contact +39 0648 7881, JVReservations@jumeirah.com

Luxurious expertise

A curated journey

Arranging the nuances of travel can be one of the most stressful parts of a holiday. For Rome, we worked with Pure Entertainment Group, a company that prides itself on creating personalised, bespoke packages. Our tour was themed on author Elizabeth Gilbert's popular memoir, *Eat, Pray, Love*, featuring a vintage Fiat journey through Rome, a private tour around the Vatican, and the opportunity to cook with an Italian grandmother in her apartment. Pureonline.com

Refined transit

When it came to choosing a company for travel between Dubai and Rome, we went with the one that has set the standard: Emirates airline. Our journey began at the Emirates First Class Lounge in Dubai. A sizeable private 'terminal' with numerous luxury shops, a cigar room, several dining areas, a sit-down restaurant with white tablecloths, sleeping areas, a private spa and more, the lounge ensures that a holiday starts before you fly. The food is splendidly luxurious (a favourite being the rows of fresh sashimi and sushi), and the complimentary 15-minute treatment in the dedicated spa a nice touch. On the spacious flight itself, we enjoyed the fully reclining seats of Emirates Business Class. A three-course meal and extensive beverage menu added to the atmosphere of luxury. For entertainment, Emirates's range of up-to-date movies satisfied. Staff members were courteous without being overly present, and the environment was one of sumptuous sophistication. By the time we arrived in Italy, we were refreshed, well fed, relaxed, and ready for a true Roman holiday. *Flights from Dubai to Rome take just over six hours and run several times throughout the day. Emirates also flies from other locations into Rome. Visit Emirates.com.*

Beautiful rest

We stayed in the exquisitely elegant Jumeirah Grand Hotel Via Veneto. Embracing the splendour of the 1920s, this art deco hotel is located only minutes away from the Spanish Steps on the famous Via Veneto street. Created of two renovated and restored 19th Century villas, Jumeirah Grand Hotel Via Veneto offers all the modern amenities you would expect at a five-star property, alongside elegant touches. Particularly nice are original paintings by Picasso, Dali, and Guttuso lining the walls. jumeirah.com



Finally, I make my way to the Castel Sant'Angelo. This impressive building was originally designed as a mausoleum for Roman Emperor Hadrian. Created around 139 AD, the mausoleum also went through periods of serving as a fortress, and as a Papal residence. Today its round walls house the Museo Nazionale di Castel Sant'Angelo, a museum that speaks of the timelessness of Rome.

Evening

I return to Jumeirah Grand Hotel Via Veneto for an early dinner. The atmosphere is relaxed with feelings of old-world 1920s grandeur. Guests lounge elegantly on sofas and chairs as the sun sets. I order a drink from the 1920s inspired menu. An array of delicate canapés, including finger sandwiches, cooked meats, and rich crisps, are served complimentary.

For dinner, I order a simple salad that reinvents my understanding of niçoise. Rather than the traditional over-cooked tuna, the dish is presented with fish delightfully seared on the outside and sashimi-pink on the inside. Poached green beans, salty olives, eggs boiled until their yolks are only just firm, and fresh potatoes compliment the flavours exquisitely.

Next I move to Summertime Sky Bar & Grill, a rooftop terrace venue, to enjoy the evening atmosphere. While food can be ordered here (such as Argentinian beef or lobster cooked fresh on the open-air grill), I opt for a light cocktail. Ten minutes later, I go for a decadent dessert of rich ice cream served inside an edible chocolate-and-caramel cup shell. The environment is one at once relaxed and uniquely elegant.

DAY TWO

Morning

A leisurely breakfast is the perfect way to continue my Roman holiday. I sink into a plush seat at Magnolia Restaurant in Jumeirah Grand Hotel Via Veneto to read the paper and enjoy a fresh latte. An extensive buffet is available, providing all that would be expected alongside clever additions like swordfish and smoked tuna.

By 10am, I am out the door to explore the neighbouring area. I walk for around 13 minutes to reach the Spanish Steps, a scenic series of steps climbing the slope between the Piazza di Spagna and the Piazza Trinita dei Monti. This sunlit spot makes for the perfect photo op. At the base of the steps is a museum dedicated to English poet John Keats, and the entire surrounding area is filled with charming baroque architecture.

In Piazza di Spagna, one of the most famous shopping districts in Rome, I stroll through numerous luxury stores. I find everything from Prada to Gucci, Dolce & Gabbana to Miu Miu. The area's side streets offer smaller high-end brands and numerous leather shops.

To end my afternoon, I grab a gelato, perch on the Spanish Steps, and watch the busy life of Rome continue as it has for thousands of years. ♦