

SIX WEEKS IN ROME

By MANNY GONZALEZ
Plantation Bay Resort & Spa
Part 3 of 4: How to Do Rome in a Day (Continued)

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More on Italian food another time.

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But do it right. Find a 10-cent coin and, facing away, throw it with your right hand over your left shoulder. If you miss, get a heftier coin, say one euro. If you throw a Philippine coin you will have bad luck for 28 years. If you don't believe me, do it and see what happens. (I deny, absolutely and without mental reservation, that the Syndicate paid me to say this.)

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dulgences ("Get out of Purgatory Free" cards) to anyone who came to St. Peter's. A lot of Catholics thought this was a good idea, especially in winter when no crops were growing anyway, and wars were usually on hold. So the Piazza del Popolo must have been a pretty lively place.

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Turn to H-3

You can now see St. Peter's from a kilometer away. Approaching it was more fun before. Read article to learn why.



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From H-4

head on to St. Peter's as it is now getting dark. (The taxi ride will cost you less than 10 euros.) Note that by now the Vatican museums are closed and you will never, ever see the Sistine Chapel, at least not today. Not to worry. Here are some useful comments to convince people that you were actually inside the Vatican:

- "The admission line went all the way around the block. It took me two hours to get in."
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welcoming arms. As with a lot of things in Rome, Bernini designed this.

Now look backward. That long, wide avenue you just took is called via della Conciliazione, which dates only from 1936. Here, Mussolini did not do so good. For its first 400 years of existence, there was no clear path leading to St. Peter's. Coming from anywhere else in Rome, there were just lots of narrow lanes like cobwebs. Pilgrims had to navigate the maze of sunless streets, frequently asking for directions. Then, just when they thought they were hopelessly lost, they would turn a corner and, magically, seemingly from nowhere, the vast expanse and awesome majesty of St. Peter's Square would reveal itself. It must have felt like you had just gotten to paradise. Now, you can see the front of St. Peter's from one kilometer away, and there is no more thrill of discovery.

Anyway, enter St. Peter's. At this time of day, there will be no waiting line. There is lots to see inside, including a brass canopy by Bernini over the main altar, Michelangelo's Pieta, and much else.

#13 Dinner in Trastevere. Exiting St. Peter's, again get a cab. Tell the driver "Santa Maria in Trastevere." That's pronounced truss-TEH-veh-reh, and it means "across the Tiber," which used to be a pretty wild area, along with the Vatican. If you practice pronouncing the word correctly, the driver will be amazed at your Italian, and whisk you in about five breathtaking minutes to your destination, a picturesque plaza with a church and lots of restaurants facing it. The church is about 1,600 years old, and though not very much ever happened in this area, it is a good place to walk around what feels like a movie set, see yet more tourists, and have dinner.

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here that you should see, and it's called the Ponte Fabricio (not quite as attention-getting as Bridge of Sweet Regrets, is it?). Though it's right in the center of town, many taxi drivers won't immediately recognize the name, because it's a pedestrian bridge. Jog your driver's memory by saying "Isola Tiberina" (ih-ZO-luh tih-beh-REE-nuh), which is the only island in the Tiber river.

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First, the Ponte Fabricio could be the oldest bridge in the world (these superlatives are always a matter of scale; there might be a slab of granite crossing a two-meter stream somewhere, that is older). It was built in 62 BC during Julius Caesar's time by one Lucius Fabricius ("superintendent of roads," according to the plaques he had mounted in four different places on the bridge, just to be sure posterity would remember him) and has been in continuous use ever since, i.e., for 2,100 years. So Lucius deserves his four plaques, and all of those are still there, too.

Second, from Ponte Fabricio you have a splendid view of the Tiber rushing below you. This is no sissy bridge like the Pont Neuf in Paris, spanning the docile Seine. It's a tall, massive bridge soaring over scary-looking rapids on the roaring Tiber.

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