

GOOD OLD ROME COOKING

The Italian capital is as delicious as ever in winter – but it's hungry work. Good thing **Rachel Spence** knows a culinary classic in every district, then...

PHOTOGRAPHS BY HELEN CATHCART



So fiercely is the Eternal City touted as the perfect spring and autumn destination, you'd think the great hotel-keeper in the sky had hung a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the city gates from November to February. Wrong, wrong, wrong. Far enough south to catch all those rays surplus to requirements on the equator, Rome is uniquely ravishing in winter.

And with streets a little emptier, there's no need to rush. Let the peal of church bells and the lemony sunshine seeping through your curtains put you in the mood for a lazy morning discovering why Rome's *vita* is still the most *dolce* of all.

Built according to the whims of emperors and popes, this is a city where centuries of architects and artists enjoyed a blank cheque. Whether you say your prayers in front of one of Caravaggio's spookily life-like saints, or sip a cappuccino in the shadow of Bernini's water-splashed dolphins, Rome is as gorgeous as the movie stars – Anita Ekberg, Audrey Hepburn – who made their names here.

It is also a demanding diva: by the time the bells ring for midday Mass, you'll be hollering for sustenance. That's why we've chosen great places to eat in six central districts, each of which promise food that's filling but not fancy, Roman rather than *recherché*. From Pasolini's favourite pizza to the succulent, deep-fried artichokes that Roman Jewish mamas used to make, there's not a restaurant here that isn't steeped in a centuries-old culinary heritage. Not that chefs have shunned modernity. When the mood takes them, they'll tinker with tradition with as much gusto as if they were in New York. You're in Rome, though. Time to *eat!* >

Laughing matter: clockwise from top left, bar at Osteria dell'Ingegno; street cafe on Piazza di Santa Maria in Trastevere; paper-thin pizzas at Pizzeria Ai Marmi. Opposite, spoilt for choice – a diner gets food envy in Pizzeria Ai Marmi



ROME

Scoot-free: from left, kids hang out in the Ghetto district; the Colosseum attracts the crowds, as does the Forno del Ghetto bakery; ceilings covered in work by Raphael make for high art at the Villa Farnesina in Trastevere



ROME

SAN LORENZO

This downtown quarter is a boisterous mix of university students, resident artists and working Romans. Its soul is the Fondazione Pastificio Cerere, a temporary exhibition space in a former pasta factory that's home to a colony of painters. Currently shrouded in what is surely Europe's prettiest scaffolding (yes, even that's an artwork, too), the establishment houses a new bar-bistro, Pastifico San Lorenzo. Attractive customers have been known to receive surprise bottles of bubbly from the local painterly Lotharios... (Via Tiburtina 196; 00 39 06 9727 3519, www.pastificiocerere.com). **The local place to eat:** The restaurant B-Said is part of SAID, the chocolate factory Willy Wonka would have owned if he'd been a really smart Roman. The aroma of everyone's favourite sweet stuff penetrates every corner, even the conservatory-style space where dinner is served beneath vines trailing from the ceiling. As you wait to order, take your mind off your hunger pangs by gazing at the poetic monochrome photographs – all the work of local artists – and the inimitably glamorous diners.

Alternatively, you could take a wander among the warren of whitewashed rooms: here, gloved artisans concoct chocolatey delights of every size, shape and description, while Rome's *beau monde* lounge in the velvet armchairs, pursing their lips to sip cups of hot chocolate (£6) at its blackest, gooiest best. Owners Carla and Fabrizio de Mauro have chocolate-making in their blood – their grandfather used to run SAID as a confectionery factory in the '20s. 'When we decided to re-open, these machines were invisible under layers of dust,' recalls restaurant manager Francesco Tornielli. His previous life, running a disco on the shabby-glam island of Ponza (in the Med between Rome and Naples), explains the deck-spinners here on weekend evenings and the equally fashionable clientele. **If you only order one dish:** Salad of pigeon in a chocolate sauce (£14) will always hit the spot. The gamey aftertaste of chocolate is the perfect complement to the wine-dark flesh of these farm-raised Umbrian fowl.

● SAID (Via Tiburtina 135; 00 39 06 446 8210, www.said.it)

TRASTEVERE

The cobbled alleys, terracotta walls and vine-draped houses of Trastevere conjure up the city at her *Roman Holiday* best – just add Gregory Peck and Audrey Hepburn on a Vespa. It all centres on Piazza di Santa Maria – a cafe-edged square where senses are lulled by the splash of the fountain and the bright mosaics on the eponymous church facade. The district is also home to the Villa Farnesina, where 'home decoration' by Raphael and his pupils resulted in radiantly naughty *freschi* (Via della Lungara 230; 00 39 06 6802 7267, www.lincci.it). **The local place to eat:** Ai Marmi is marble by name and – from table-tops to floors – marble by nature. Heavy use of the material has also earned this now-iconic pizzeria the nickname L'Obitorio, 'the morgue', yet you'll be pushed to find a more vivacious place to eat in the city. The roar of a hundred happy, hungry Romans shouting across at each other assails your ears as you enter. Booking is a no-no so get in the queue, ask for a glass of Frascati on draft (£1.50) – you won't find that anywhere else – and watch the antics of the busy *pizzaioli*

as they shovel their gooey, bubbling Frisbees in and out of the wood-fired oven that has smouldered in the corner since the place opened back in the '40s. To have what the locals are having – *un po' di roba frita* (a bit of fried stuff) – wait for one of the service-with-a-squint waiters to weave through the throng, bearing plates heaped with deep-fried cod, vegetables and olives with mince. 'We never stint on the ingredients,' says Renzo Panattoni, who co-owns Ai Marmi with his brother, Carlo, when I ask him why even the stuffed olives taste like manna here. Rumour has it that cinema wunderkind Pasolini hung out here in the '50s. From the enamelled signage announcing what's frying tonight to the vintage fridge, little has changed. **If you only order one dish:** *Pizza con fiori di zucca* is topped with deep-fried mozzarella-and-anchovy-stuffed courgette flowers (£7.50). Need we say more? OK – it's salty, fishy, crispy, creamy heaven-on-a-plate with basil on top – so you can say you had your greens. ● Pizzeria Ai Marmi (Viale Trastevere 53-59; 00 39 06 580 0919) >



Eat your heart out: from far left, courgettes piled high at the Testaccio market; the fountain in Piazza Navona is handily placed a few steps from I Tre Scalini gelateria; a waiter collects an order at Pizzeria Ai Marmi; pigeon in chocolate sauce at B-Said



Sticky fingers: a diner takes 'roast chicken to eat with the hands' literally. Opposite, *carciofi alla giudia* is the signature dish at Da Giggetto; Hadrian's Temple



THE GHETTO

Jews have been cooking up a storm in Rome since imperial times, and any visit to the Ghetto should start at the justly-famous Forno del Ghetto bakery, whose damson and ricotta pie has been a magnet for generations of Romans, regardless of religion (Via del Portico d'Ottavia 1). Thus fortified, proceed to the Museo Ebraico. With its silken Torah cloths, brutal papal edicts and chilling Holocaust uniform, it is a poignant journey through the district's history as a place of both refuge and persecution (Lungotevere Cenci; 00 39 06 6840 0661, www.museoebraico.roma.it; £6).

The local place to eat: At Da Giggetto, the bouquet of bulging, purple-tipped artichokes that takes pride of place on the terrace proclaims the house speciality – *carciofi alla giudia*, deep-fried artichokes cooked in the Jewish tradition (£5). They've been the *specialità della casa* since Luigi Ceccarelli opened the restaurant in 1923; further evidence that little has changed here for an exceedingly long time comes in the form of Lydia Ceccarelli, who has been totting up invoices behind the cash desk for 54 years. Coiffed and ladylike, she takes no nonsense from the white-jacketed waiters clustered obediently around her.

'The Jews were poor but they liked to eat, and they discovered that frying made even the most basic ingredients tasty,' she says. Hence those *carciofi alla giudia*. Also popular with Romans seeking the food their mamma used to make are offal dishes such as *trippa alla romana* (the squeam-factor is lower than you think, thanks to lashings of tomato, pecorino and mint; £11).

To imbibe the atmosphere that inspired ancient cooks, sit on the terrace to eat, and gaze through the Portico d'Ottavia – a two-arch tunnel of Roman marble and brick – onto the pockmarked travertine loggias of the classical Teatro di Marcello. Da Giggetto's hanging baskets might be wilting a little – the seen-better-times effect is noticeable even after a few glasses of wine – yet somehow, as that golden oil drips down your chin, it all makes for a nostalgic thrill.

If you only order one dish: It has to be the artichokes.

'It was a donkey that discovered that artichokes were edible,' declares Lydia, her steeliness belying a gentle heart, just as the batter-crisp case of her chef's signature dish yields to reveal its meltingly soft contents. The donkey done good.

● Da Giggetto (Via del Portico d'Ottavia 21; 00 39 06 686 1105, www.giggetto.it)

MONTI

With its maze of quiet streets and ivy-bedecked townhouses, Monti feels a million miles from the Colosseum crowds. Yet this discreet residential district is just five or so minutes away on foot – the perfect escape after a morning following in gladiatorial footsteps. It's a well-kept secret among stylish Romans, who come here for the select boutiques. Sumptuous Indian scarves and hand-made Italian bags are the province of Jakevai (Via Madonna dei Monti 94; www.jakevai.com). Just up the road, Alè Parfum sells the Tauleto range of scents and candles made from Sangiovese red wine (Via Leonina 5; www.aleparfum.com). And spicy hot chocolate with whipped cream (£3) is a treat at artisanal chocolatier La Bottega del Cioccolato (Via Leonina 82; www.labottegadelcioccolato.it).

The local place to eat: Urbana 47 scored a hat-trick with the three Monti-dwellers from whom I begged a lunch recommendation. I'm not surprised. My pasta dish was superb – the Sicilian cauliflower was cooked to a crunch, tangily dressed with lemon juice and oil, enrobed in velvet-smooth béchamel and given a deliciously crispy cheese topping.

Owner Angelo Belli is concerned with the ethics of cooking so, where possible, ingredients (organic) come from the Rome area and are bought directly from the supplier. Dishes in colour-coded bowls (£8 for pasta, £4.50 for veg) are laid out on a big trestle table opposite the glass-walled kitchen where the chefs scurry, sizzle and chop. While your choice is heated up, take a pew at one of the vintage-trendy tables and watch the show. If you're taken with the decor here, you're in luck – practically everything here is for sale, from jars of jam and fruit juice made by local nuns and monks to the designer furniture.

Come nightfall, Urbana 47 is no Cinderella (although the chef does put pumpkin in his amaretto-flavoured risotto; £10). It glams up with a proper seasonal à la carte menu that might include vegetable *polpettine* (meatballs minus their key ingredient) with sweet pecorino cheese and sheep's yoghurt – a combo that takes the idea that Italians don't do veggie cooking, and blows it right out of the kitchen.

If you only order one dish: Go for roast chicken 'to eat with the hands' with potatoes and pine-nuts (£13.50). The butter-soft meat melts away from the bone and the pine nuts lend a creamy note.

● Urbana 47 (Via Urbana 47; 00 39 06 4788 4006, www.urbana47.it) >

What did the Romans ever do for us? The Pantheon is one legacy not to be sniffed at

BY THE TIME THE BELLS RING FOR MIDDAY MASS, YOU'LL BE HOLLERING FOR SUSTENANCE

PANTHEON

Fancy a *gelato*? You've come to the right corner of Rome. Buy one at I Tre Scalini on Piazza Navona, then perch on Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers – Baroque masterpieces come cheaper than *caffè* tables in this rumbustious square. More culture? Velázquez's portrait of Pope Innocent X – the last word on the psychology of power – is the highlight of the painting collection at Galleria Doria Pamphilj (Via del Corso 305; 00 39 06 679 7323, www.doriapamphilj.it; £8.50).

The local place to eat: On the terrace of Osteria dell'Ingegno, you'll feel transported back to classical times – the 2nd-century columns of Hadrian's Temple rise above you and your bowl of *tonarelli a cacio e pepe*, the classic Roman pasta with sheep's cheese and black pepper. The interior, however, with its burnt-orange walls, wacky papier-mâché masks and painted table-tops, is far from ancient, and the menu overturns tradition by adding crunchy courgette sticks to that supposedly classic pasta dish, while the courgette flowers with goat's cheese and *bottarga* (Sardinian tuna roe) are roasted rather than fried (£14). For owner Gianmarco Nicchi, first-rate ingredients are key: one of his signature dishes is a juicy yet low-fat buffalo steak (£19) served with *puntarelli* (vitamin-rich Roman greens). But dishes such as stockfish stewed in white wine with raisins and pine nuts (£12) reveal that he hasn't forgotten his roots – 'My father cooked it when I was growing up in Liguria,' he recalls with a smile.

If you only order one dish: *Tarte tatin* (£8) is served on a drizzled zig-zag of chocolate sauce, along with almonds and dinky cups of cinnamon ice cream and cinnamon-dusted cream.

● Osteria dell'Ingegno (Piazza di Pietra 45; 00 39 06 678 0662)

TESTACCIO

That this southwestern quarter of the city became a gastronomic stronghold was largely thanks to the presence of the slaughterhouse, a sinister industrial space that is now a contemporary art museum, Macro Testaccio; brash and brutal installations are on show until midnight (Piazza Orazio Giustiniani 4; 00 39 06 6710 70400, www.macro.roma.museum). Nowadays, the abattoir's legacy lives on in the cacophonous, colourful quilt of fruit, fish, vegetables and great-value shoes that is Testaccio Market. Just round the corner from Piazza Testaccio lies Volpetti (Via Marmorata 47; 00 39 06 574 2352, www.fooditaly.com), a delicatessen that seems to attract more faithful followers than the Sistine Chapel – try the Alpine cheese Bagòss, known with typical Roman understatement as 'white gold'.

The local place to eat: Rock up to Tuttifrutti late on a Thursday evening, and don't be surprised if diners at neighbouring tables burst into song. Having finished their practice, students at the local choral school brave the utilitarian furniture and full-wattage lighting because they can't resist dishes such as fresh anchovies with orange segments, and fettucine with artichoke and anchovy pesto (£8.50). Concocted by actress-turned-chef Anna Ruggia, every dish on the menu will give your taste buds a workout.

'My grandfather was a hotel chef,' she says when asked for her secret, 'and I've inherited his passion and his palate.' The result is delicious food, at prices that don't frighten the scholars.

If you only order one dish: Spaghetti with lemon and caper fruits (£8). Sounds simple; tastes complicated (in a good way), thanks to the cunning addition of chilli flakes and orange peel. ■

● Tuttifrutti (Via Luca della Robbia 3a; 00 39 06 575 7902)

Get me there

GO INDEPENDENT

BA (0844 493 0787, www.ba.com) flies from Gatwick to Rome Fiumicino from £98 return.

EasyJet (www.easyjet.com) flies to Rome Ciampino from Bristol; and to Rome Fiumicino from Gatwick. **Jet2** (www.jet2.com) has flights from Manchester and Leeds Bradford to Rome Ciampino. **Aer Lingus** (www.aerlingus.com) flies to Rome Fiumicino from Belfast International. **Ryanair** (www.ryanair.com) flies to Rome Ciampino from Stansted, Gatwick, Edinburgh, East Midlands, Dublin and Glasgow.

WHERE TO STAY

Rome's best-value B&B. **Daphne Inn** (00 39 06 8745 0086, www.daphne-rome.com); doubles from £85. B&B occupies two historic townhouses. **Buonanotte Garibaldi** (00 39 06 5833 0733, www.buonanottegaribaldi.com); doubles from £127. B&B is a special find in Trastevere, run by artist Luisa Longo, and possessed of a delightful courtyard. For a special-occasion weekend,

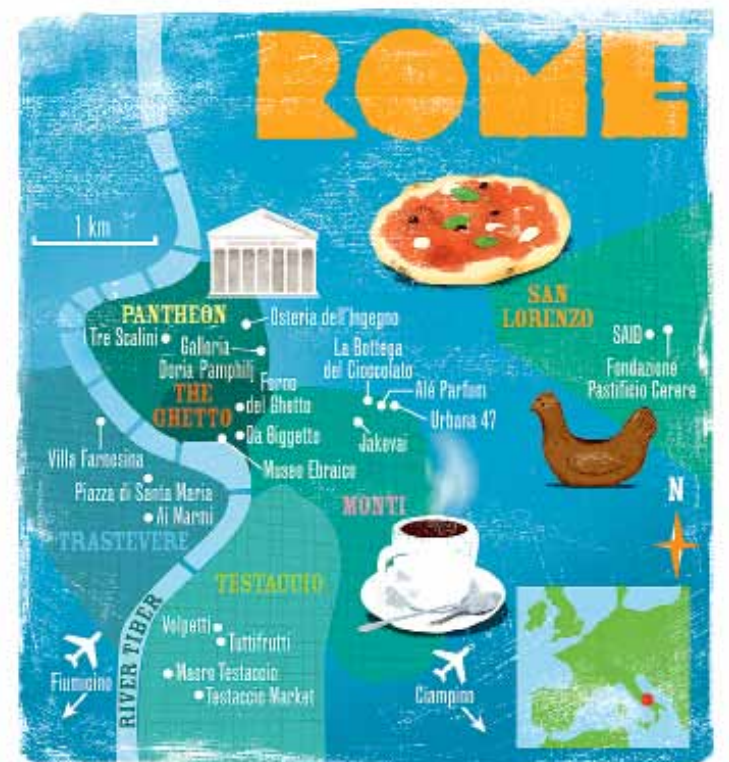
check in to the five-star **Rome Cavalieri** (00 39 06 3509 2031, www.romecavalieri.com); doubles from £319. B&B, which has an elevated location with panoramic views over Rome, a spa, a painting by Tiepolo in its private art collection, and the city's only three-Michelin-starred restaurant.

TOURS

For your own guide, contact **Italy With Us** (00 39 06 3972 3051, www.italywithus.com); from £42pp). Alternatively, get in touch with city-based historian and tour guide **James Hill** (00 39 347 875 4486); his private walks of Rome and the Vatican City for up to four people start at £135 for half a day.

GO PACKAGED

Italy specialist **Citalia** (0844 415 1956, www.citalia.com) has three nights at the five-star Rome Cavalieri, from £575pp, B&B, with flights; three nights at three-star San Remo, near the Colosseum, costs from £215pp, B&B, with flights. **Kirker Holidays** (020 7593 1899, www.kirkerholidays.com)



has three nights at four-star Hotel Marcella Royal, near Via Veneto, with a roof terrace, from £488pp, B&B, in a twin or double room, with flights and private transfers. Also try **Trailfinders** (0845 050 5940, www.trailfinders.com);

three nights at central four-star Hotel Gambrinus from £219pp, B&B, including flights from Heathrow.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Visit www.rome.info.