

WAYS TO GO LOCAL IN ROME

*When in Rome,
don't hesitate
to go full
immersion, says
resident writer
Erica Firpo.
Follow her five
rules of local
life to have even
more fun in this
magnificent city*

PHOTOGRAPHY SUSAN WRIGHT



STAND AT THE BAR

There is nothing more Roman than the morning bar scene, a synchronised ballet of caffeinated chaos, where bar staff effortlessly orchestrate orders for a seemingly frenzied clientele, each vying for his or her counter space and a round of *caffè e cornetto* (coffee and pastry), before which the day cannot proceed. It's like a vaguely familiar opera with its lyrics a menu of different variations on an espresso-based cup of joe – *lungo*, *corto*, *ristretto*, *corretto*, *marrochino*, *macchiato*, *cappuccino*, *shakerato*. Forget that languid latte hangout you're used to: push forward and claim your space at the counter. As my ex-boyfriend (an impatient Roman who never saw the point in sitting down for a cup of coffee) used to say: 'This is me time. It's not a social moment, unless you're chatting up the barista.' Do both at Roscioli Caffè (Piazza Benedetto Cairoli 16). ►





UNLEASH YOUR *BELLA FIGURA*

To paraphrase an old Vidal Sassoon advert: ‘If you don’t look good, we don’t look good.’ Every Italian lives and loves by the rule of *la bella figura*, the philosophical concept that beautiful behaviour and personal style are present from the first step out of the door – and that these traits will open doors, too. In other words, no Roman worth their salt will leave home without properly pressed and co-ordinated attire, stylish sunglasses and, most importantly, great hair. Whether going to a meeting, a flirty aperitivo, a parent-teacher conference, the doctor or the gym, these golden rules apply. Looking good is as fundamental to the Italian way of life as a bowl of pasta. Strut your stuff on Via del Babuino, Rome’s most pedicured shopping street. For people-watching, park yourself at an outdoor table at Pierluigi (Piazza dé Ricci) or Bar Stravinskji (Via del Babuino).

ENJOY THE MOMENT

Much has been said about the Italian *dolce far niente*, sweet idleness. What we Romans call a *pausa*, you may consider an unnecessarily long break. But remember, there is a reason behind these extra minutes – it has nothing to do with laziness and everything to do with art. Masters of palettes, plates and pitches, Italians can take something innocuous and turn it into an incredible painting, mouthwatering dish or fabulous football match. The same goes for conversation: a charming verbal parry readily transforms into a languorous hours-long discussion, preferably with a fork or wine glass in hand. Apply a little Italianised mindfulness to your *mezzogiorno* midday meal with an outdoor table at La Matricianella (below, Via del Leone 4).



EAT ALLA ROMANA

We have a great saying in Roman dialect: ‘*Quer che nù strozza ngrassa*.’ What doesn’t kill you makes you fat. It’s a pretty good summation of this city’s extraordinary cuisine: simple and local, featuring a mix of butchers’ leftovers. Try *trippa pajata* (the intestines of an unweaned calf), the famous *quinto quarto* (offal) and my personal favourites pork belly and pork cheek. But it is also comfort food. I’m never happier than when sitting before a hearty plate of *pasta alla amatriciana* (above), or savouring hand-picked vegetable dishes such as *puntarelle* (chicory shoots with an olive oil, garlic, vinegar and anchovy dressing), *ovoli* (a rare mushroom, sliced up with parmesan cheese) or the famous *carciofi alla giudia* (fried artichoke). We love our gnocchi, too, but be warned: the bite-sized potato pasta is traditionally made and served only on Thursday afternoons. Make space for a full *antipasto-primo-secondo* dinner to try as much as you can. My favourite dish is my aunt Graziella’s *abbacchio al forno* (oven-baked suckling lamb) but when I’m out, I love eating at Felice a Testaccio (Via Mastro Giorgio 29).

EXPRESS YOURSELF

Have you ever noticed how Romans, and in fact most Italians, always seem to talk loudly and with lots of hand gestures? Well, they’re not actually shouting and arguing. They are expressively sharing emotions, stories and experiences with a joy that is accented by a bit of a finger flourish – and the use of superlatives and gestures adds to the importance of their words. It’s an easy rule to follow. If you like that *pizza al taglio* from the Forno in Campo de’ Fiori, exclaim ‘*buonissima!*’ with a finger kiss. When you find that hidden Caravaggio at Sant’Agostino church, throw your hands up in the air and say ‘*ma amazza, che bella!*’ And when you look at an overly expensive price tag, give a little ‘*ma daje*’ and a ‘tsk-tsk’ finger wave. ■



WHEN IN ROME

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