

## Chapter Five

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### ROME

#### WELCOME TO ROME

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I realize that Rome is known as the Eternal City and people like to think it's been this way more or less for over 2,000 years, give or take the invention of modern transportation and high-rises and a change in calendars. But the Rome you visit today is incredibly different than the Rome that existed a mere 2 years ago. There are changes everywhere and mostly in the air. *O sole mio*, this place is hot.

Rome has a new energy and excitement that were never there before (in my lifetime, anyway). While the voluptuous pleasures of the south still hang in the air, a lot of people from Milan have moved down—business is beginning to snap, crackle, and pop. *Pronto! Is that my phone ringing?*

Rome, of course, has always had a great designer upscale shopping neighborhood, but the arrival of the euro has brought new high prices. Now you shop for selection . . . or for the big brands at discount stores. Part of the glory that is Rome is that while there are heaps of designer shops, there are heaps of everything else, too. Even the magazine stands are fabulous to drool over.

Actually, truth be told, aside from the Fendi store, I'm not that knocked out with the so-called luxury Spanish Steps district. I'm not saying ignore it; I am saying that if your dollars

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are dear and you are not a first-timer, you may have more fun on side streets and in back alleys and away from the slick brands. My best shopping days in Rome are spent in older districts, in tiny alleys, and on back streets. I prefer to buy alternative retail, funky designs, vintage clothes, and soap. I prefer to prowl the Campo dei Fiori, to get lost in the medieval warren of streets behind the Piazza Navona.

### ARRIVING IN ROME

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#### By Plane

You can fly into Rome's airport from anyplace in the world. The airport is quite a bit out of town and a taxi will easily set you back 50€ to 73€ (\$55–\$80). There's also a train, but I digress.

*Before arrival, please note:* A private car and driver cost relatively the same thing as a taxi, by the way (a little more, but usually not much). As a result, many people book a car and driver to meet them or ask their hotel to provide this service. I've been given a source by my friend, Logan; you can call Gianni Ceglia on his mobile phone (☎ 0338/80-89-3970). I now stay at the Hotel Exedra in Rome; its airport service is 50€ (\$55).

If you can manage your luggage on your own, you may want to take the train from the airport right to the central train station in beautiful downtown Roma. It costs about 9€ (\$10) and is a total breeze if you're not laden with heavy bags. There's also a great shopping mall in this train station, but I digress.

If you arrive in Rome from another EU country, there are no formalities. The color of your luggage tag is coded so that you don't even go through Immigration or Customs. You suddenly end up in the luggage retrieval area, watching fashion shows and car videos on large-screen TV monitors while waiting for your bags.

Luggage trolleys are free. There's both a *cambio* for changing money and a bank machine (better rates than the *cambio*), although the lines can be long. Still, since you have to wait for

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your bags to arrive, you might as well stock up on cash and be done with it.

You can connect to the train from within the arrivals terminal (it is well marked), but you must forfeit your trolley to use the escalator—so again, make sure you can handle your luggage on your own or with your travel companion. You can also get to the train station from outside, which is easier if you are a bit bulky with bags, since there are ramps for trolleys and carts.

Before you even exit the terminal, be aware that you might be assaulted by taxi drivers: These are gypsy drivers who may even have official taxis with medallions and may convince you that they are legit. Furthermore, they will quote the price in an odd manner, further confusing you. Watch out!

There is an official taxi rank, but you must find it, which I happen to have had trouble doing over a period of many years (slow learner). If you end up on the curb wondering what to do—look right and then walk right. You will find the taxi stand—I promise.

### By Train

All rail tracks do indeed lead to Rome, be it intra-Italian trains or any of the fancy intra-European trains, including Eurostar (Italian Eurostar, not the Chunnel version). The Centrale train station (Termini) was spiffed up for the last Jubilee Year (2000) and is looking far better than you may remember it. The fact that it has a giant Nike shop in the front and a series of electronic kiosks for E-tickets should give you a hint that this is the New Italy.

As you emerge from the main train station, you'll see taxis everywhere; you may even be approached by some drivers who offer their services. Again, there is an official taxi stand with a very long line right in front of the train station. You wonder why you don't just hop into one of the waiting cabs, defying the queue. Why are all those people standing in line for up to 20 minutes? Because they don't want to overpay, be cheated, or come to blows with aggressive taxi drivers.

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Rome wasn't built in a day, nor were the taxi scams being run out of the main train station. All those people can't be wrong. Stand in line, and you'll get a legitimate cab.

*Tip:* One of the reasons I now stay at the Exedra is that I can borrow a trolley from the train station and walk to the hotel.

### By Ship

If by chance you are coming to Rome via ship, the port is Civitavecchia (say: *Cheat-a-veck-e-abhhh*), along the coast north and west of Rome. It can take up to 2 hours to get into downtown Rome from here, although 1 hour is the no-traffic estimate. If you are going directly from your ship to the Rome airport, it will take 1 hour on a superhighway, and you will not actually go into Rome at all. (*Arrivederci, Roma.*)

And one final ship-to-shore report: During the summer, most stores close for the day on Saturday at 1:30pm. This isn't really a problem for you, however, because you arrive in port at 7am and make it to Rome by 9:30am, when the stores open. You have the whole morning to shop. You go to lunch at 1:30pm, when the stores close, and slowly eat a glorious Roman midday feast. Head back to the ship around 4pm and arrive in time for cocktails. Or stop off in Tarquena, a sneeze away from the port, where they have some cutie-pie retail, and yes, I thought you'd never ask, a few pottery shops.

Naturally, cruise ships offer their own shore excursions and even shopping trips. The tour offered from Civitavecchia on a recent Holland America Line cruise didn't even take you into Rome. Instead, you got "Tarquina with Shopping"—a tour that included ancient burial tombs and then a visit to the Civitavecchia Shopping Mall.

### The Lay of the Land

The city of Rome is divided into 33 zones, working in circular rounds much like the *arrondissements* of Paris. The oldest part of the city is 1, Centro Storico. I have instead divided Rome into my own areas or neighborhoods; see below.

## Getting Around 65

Technically speaking, Vatican City is a different city than Rome; that's why it has its own guards (who are Swiss), its own postal service, and its own euro coins, which, with Pope John Paul II's image on them, are thought to be collectable due to the Pope's advanced age and the anticipation of a new pope, whose picture will go on new euro coins.

### ABOUT ADDRESSES

Addresses seem to bounce around from street to street; some alternate in a sensible way and some make no sense at all. Frequently, all the stores in a block have the same street number and are designated by letters. It's not unusual for a store to be listed according to its piazza or its street corner.

## GETTING AROUND

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**Walk.**

Okay, so it's too hot to walk that much, and the city's too spread out. So, the best time investment you can make is to organize your days so that you can do lots of walking; this keeps you out of crazy Roman traffic and on the streets so that you can count the fountains. Also, like most major Italian cities, Rome has new laws about motor traffic, and only certain cars with certain permits are allowed in certain areas.

**Taxi** Taxi drivers in Rome are known to be difficult, especially to tourists, especially to Americans who can't speak Italian, and most especially to women traveling without men. Be prepared to occasionally have to argue with the driver if you take cabs; be aware of when you should pay a supplement (for extra baggage and for rides after 9pm and on Sun and holidays). I continue to have unpleasant situations with taxi drivers, enough so that I think the difference between Italy and France can be summed up in the way you are treated by taxis. But enough about me.

# Rome & Its Shopping Neighborhoods





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Legitimate taxis carry a shield with a number. Cars for hire are black with a shield. Taking any other car can be dangerous.

**Metro** There is a metro, the Metropolitana. It's nice and gets you to most of the touristy attractions, but it does not blanket the city. You may find the walk from your hotel to the nearest stop (look for the big red M sign) worthy of a taxi in itself. One of the reasons I switched hotels to the Exedra is that it is 50m (164 ft.) from the Repubblica metro stop. These days, these things count.

To ride the metro, have change to put into the ticket machine, or look around for a machine that produces change. You must get your ticket from one of the machines; there is no booth selling tickets. (The newsstand will not give you change without a purchase.) Because the metro is not too involved, it is easy to ride, and safe. A Metrobus card, which costs about 2.75€ (\$3) per day, allows you unlimited use of the metro and buses. It's sold in train stations and at *tabac* stands.

**Bus** I love to take the bus in Rome, although many people will tell you that buses are slow and not dependable, especially in the rain. But the bus gives you a nice view of this gorgeous city and gets you easily to the main attractions. To find out which bus to take, you can buy a bus map at a newsstand, you can ask your concierge, or you can read the sign at the bus stop that lists all the stops. Also check inside the telephone book in your hotel room, which may have a bus and metro map.

I once took the right bus in the wrong direction—a typical mistake for those who don't speak the language or know their way around the city very well—but I had a great time and saw a lot of sights.

Rome has many bus islands that act as little stations where buses congregate. There's one such island in front of the Vittorio Emanuele monument in the old city, and another called San Silvestro, which is in the heart of the shopping district at the base of the Via Veneto and halfway to the Spanish Steps.

The bus system in Rome is similar to those in other Italian cities: You must purchase your ticket at a tobacco stand or newsstand ahead of time (they do not sell tickets on the bus or take



money); you enter from the rear and cancel your own ticket in the box; and you exit from the center of the bus. Instructions in English and Italian are inside the bus.

## SLEEPING IN ROME

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### American Chains

The American hotel chains have made a comfortable dent in the Roman scene; they often offer deals (in dollars, no less) that are too good to be true. While there are several chains (see below), note that with the addition of a spa, the Hilton has reached icon status. While it has a slightly screwy location, it has become a major, major player. See below for more on the Hilton.

**Hilton** Originally, I thought this hotel would be inconvenient for a shopper, but years ago I decided to give it a whirl. After all, the hotel has a shuttle bus to the shopping districts as well as special promotional rates. Furthermore, it has its own swimming pool and a resort ambience—perfect for summer in Rome, which is always a scorching situation. We all know to trust the Hilton brand, but few of us know that this is one of the most famous, and different, Hilton hotels in the system.

The hotel has a fabulous, and famous, rooftop restaurant, La Pergola. But it gets better: Always famous for its swimming pool and parklike grounds, this Hilton now has a spa. Not just any old spa, as is the rage among all hotels, but a spa of such grand proportions that it was possibly created to make Cleopatra roll over in her grave. This spa has become so important in the local landscape that now zillions of celebs stay here. The buzz on the hotel has changed from that of insider's secret to bastion of hip.

**Holiday Inn/Crowne Plaza** The Holiday Inn in Rome is the Minerva. It, too, is a five-star hotel, so in some ways it competes with the bigger names listed here. Children up to age 19 stay free in their parents' room in all Holiday Inn properties, so this is something to consider. When I called Holiday Inn,

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they explained that prices change on a daily basis, depending on availability, but rates booked in U.S. dollars are guaranteed at that rate. Furthermore, I was offered an additional discount for being an AAA member, which brought my room rate for a fall booking to \$309.25. Not bad, considering that the regular rate on these rooms is often over \$380.

**InterContinental** The Hotel de la Ville InterContinental Roma has the best location of any of the U.S. chains for shopping, as well as some rather good deals. Last time I looked, the Hotel de la Ville was booking at \$250 per night, guaranteed in U.S. dollars. Note that you get breakfast with this rate, as well as 500 frequent-flier miles. Also note that the Hotel de la Ville is next door to the Hassler, one of the most famous hotels in Rome, known for its excellent location at the top of the Spanish Steps.

**Marriott** Rome Hotel Grand Flora is now open on the famous shopping street Via Veneto. Marriott is in business with the Bulgari family.

**Sheraton** Sheraton/Starwood has long had an interesting position in Rome. They have a modern hotel in the middle of nowhere, halfway between Rome and the airport; it's frequently booked by cruise companies for turning around passengers. **Westin** has taken most of the Ciga properties that Sheraton was holding onto, including the Hotel Excelsior, well located on the Via Veneto and also often booked for cruise passengers. It is a gloriously old-fashioned grande-dame hotel worthy of royalty. Please note that special rates almost always have to be booked before you arrive.

**Westin** In Rome it's the Excelsior—grande-dame hotel right on the Via Veneto just up the block from the American Embassy. There are also Sheraton hotels—they are mostly on the outskirts of large cities or attached to business parks.

Addresses and phones are below.

**CAVALIERI HILTON**  
*Via Cadiolo 101*  
U.S.: © 800/HILTONS

CROWNE PLAZA MINERVA  
*Piazza della Minerva 49*  
U.S.: ☎ 800/465-4329

EXCELSIOR HOTEL (WESTIN)  
*Via Veneto 125*  
U.S. and Canada: ☎ 800/325-3589

HOTEL DE LA VILLE INTERCONTINENTAL ROMA  
*Via Sistina 69*  
U.S.: ☎ 800/327-0200

MARRIOTT GRAND FLORA  
*Via Veneto 191*  
U.S.: ☎ 888/236-2427

SHERATON ROMA  
*Viale del Pattinaggio*  
☎ 06/545-31; or 800/325-3535 in the U.S.

## Dream Hotels

EXEDRA  
*Piazza della Repubblica 47 (metro: Repubblica).*

This hotel changed my life and my vision of Rome. It's new inside, old outside, and built over ruins, which can be seen through glass floors on the lower level. Just head down to the Business Center.

The restaurant is designed by my hero Adam Tihany. The hotel location right above a metro station makes transportation a breeze. Furthermore, you can walk to the main train station. (The taxi line was so long when I arrived in Rome that I popped my bags on a trolley and arrived at the hotel pushing the trolley and pulling my dog.) The staff is dressed in very chic black on black; everyone is friendly and helpful; and because the hotel is so new, you have the feeling of having made a great discovery.

There's a cooking school, sumptuous rooms, and, get this, a McDonald's next door. Any luxury hotel with a McDonald's

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is my kind of place, although I hear they are trying to ease out the fast food. There's also a movie theatre (with some selections in English), a rooftop pool and spa, and more chic than the average person can begin to absorb.

But wait, I'm not finished. I brought my dog with me, and when we arrived in the room, there was a large VIP basket for her, filled with dog food, biscuits, a toy, etc. Now that's catering to a client's special needs. Rooms begin at 296€ (\$325). For reservations, call ☎ 800/337-4685 in the U.S. Local phone 06/489-381. [exedra.boscolohotels.com](http://exedra.boscolohotels.com). Do not confuse this hotel with the trendy Es Hotel.

### ALEPH HOTEL

*Via di San Basilio 15 (metro: Barberini).*

Considering my heartthrob Adam Tihany designed this hotel, it's a pity I had to stare at it without sleeping in it. Indeed this is the small, cozy, artsy boutique hotel for those who want luxury on the sly. There's a spa, a Moroccan-style restaurant, and a location nestled not too far from the Spanish Steps and Via Veneto. For reservations, call ☎ 800/337-4685 in the U.S. Local phone 06/422-901. [aleph.boscolohotels.com](http://aleph.boscolohotels.com).

### HOTEL DE RUSSIE

*Via del Babuino 9 (metro: Spagna).*

While I am not a big fan of modern hotels, I admit to falling head over heels in love with this one, a recent entry from Sir Rocco Forte and as delicious and decadent as the Delano in Miami Beach. On top of all that: a fabulous shopping location at the Piazza del Popolo. Sir Rocco Forte also re-created the Savoy in Florence (see chapter 6). For reservations, call ☎ 800/323-7500 in the U.S. Local phone 06/32-88-81.

## Four-Star Finds

### HOTEL CARRIAGE

*Via delle Carrozze 36 (metro: Spagna).*

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This is just one of those “finds” that I discovered while shopping in the Spanish Steps district. I stumbled on it, so I did not stay here but did do an inspection. This is indeed a find—a great shopping location and a nice little four-star for those who would rather put their extra euros into their shopping sprees. The hotel has the tiny, clubby, modest feel of home.

Singles start at 136€ (\$150); a suite is about 227€ (\$250). Local phone ☎ 06/69-91-24. Fax 06/678-82-79. hotel.carriage@fanet.it.

**JOLLY HOTEL VITTORIO VENETO**

*Corso Italia 1 (metro: Barberini).*

One of those newfangled, post-World War II, high-style modern Italian buildings, the Jolly gives you the best of both worlds. Your room overlooks the park, and you are situated at the top of the Via Veneto, so you can just roll out of bed and into the stores. It’s rare to find the American crowd here; the hotel is often frequented by businesspeople. Rates, which include a big breakfast buffet, start at around 182€ (\$200)—a great price for Rome. There are also various promotional deals, including a package called Mitica Roma (available for all four Jolly hotels in Rome), which puts a room at less than 182€ (\$200) per night, and weekend nights, when added on, are about 109€ (\$120) per night for two. For reservations, call ☎ 800/221-2626 in the U.S. Local phone 167/01-77-03 (toll-free) or 06/84-951. [www.jollyhotels.it](http://www.jollyhotels.it).

**SOFITEL ROMA**

*Via Lombardia 47 (metro: Spagna).*

One of Sofitel’s new and grand hotels, a renovated mansion near the Borghese Gardens. This is the former Hotel Boston, in case you or your taxi driver is confused. Don’t miss the fifth-floor terrace. Prices are not low and can be over 364€ (\$400) per room if you don’t get a promotional deal. For reservations, call ☎ 800/SOFITEL in the U.S. Local phone 06/47-80-29-58. [www.sofitel.com](http://www.sofitel.com).

## Snack & Shop

### LA CARBONARA

*Piazza Campo dei Fiori 23 (no nearby metro).*

This is one of the few places in Rome where it is as pleasant to eat inside as outside, where your experience is as special in winter as in spring. Located right on the Campo dei Fiori, this seems to be the nicest of the surrounding cafes. The interior is done in a rustic country style, with some tables overlooking the piazza. The daily fruit and flower market adds to the charm of the location and makes this restaurant a must. This is one of the few restaurants in the area that is open on Sunday, but the flower market is closed on Sunday. For reservations, call © 06/686-47-83. Closed Tuesday.

### MCDONALD'S

*Piazza di Spagna, near the Spanish Steps (metro: Spagna).*

Stop laughing. I love this McDonald's, and not just because my son does. The architecture (it's in a fake villa) is astounding, the location is sublime, and the food is inexpensive for Rome, if not by U.S. standards. You can get the usual burgers and McNuggets, or load up at the salad bar, where you can get tomatoes and mozzarella. You have to see this place. The crowd it gets is amazing. It's a good place to rest between stores. Logan says to sit downstairs where it's less noisy, and where ice cream and Baci (the chocolates) are sold.

### NINO

*Via Borgognona 11 (metro: Spagna).*

My favorite restaurant in Rome, Nino is a small bistro with dark wood walls, and it's located right in the heart of the Spanish Steps shopping area. It attracts a nice, fashionable crowd without being chi-chi.

Prices are moderate by Rome standards, which to me is incredibly inexpensive, especially for this location and style. I just got my Visa bill: My last lunch at Nino, an admittedly simple affair

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consisting of bottled water, one Coca-Cola, spaghetti, and a coffee, was all of 13€ (\$14). Tip included. The waiters are friendly; I often eat here solo and feel comfortable doing so. If you get here early (by local standards) for lunch, you don't need a reservation. Or you can plan ahead and call ☎ 06/679-56-76. Closed Sunday.

But wait! I just got a letter from a reader who loves Nino and bemoaned the Sunday closure to the waiter Lorenzo. Lorenzo sent them to **Ristorante 34**, which they adored. By mentioning that Lorenzo sent them, they got VIP treatment.

### RISTORANTE GIRARROSTO TOSCANO

*Via Campania 29 (no nearby metro).*

This country-style place is at the top of the Via Veneto (across the street from the Jolly, around the corner from the Excelsior). Sit down and feast on the antipasti, for which there is a flat charge per person, no matter how much you eat. After you've eaten more than you knew possible, they bring dinner. The cooking style is Florentine; the wine is Chianti (although there are plenty of others); the atmosphere is adorable (covered in tiles and charm); the crowd is well heeled, although there are some tourists. And prices are moderate. Book a reservation (☎ 06/482-18-99), especially for after 8pm, as the place does fill up. Closed Wednesday.

## THE SHOPPING SCENE

Shopping is something you do in Rome while you are doing Rome . . . or in between meals. Aside from making a frontal attack on Via Condotti and the fancy stores in that area, you will find shopping ops as you explore Rome, and not vice versa.

Roman style is still a little bit old couture, but mostly Roman fashion reflects Rome's geographic location: This is philosophically—and fashion wise—the south of Italy. As such, Rome is rather like the Beverly Hills of Italy, and the clothes for sale here have a glitz and gleam to them that you won't

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find up north. Even the Milanese who have moved on down here don't wear black. Colors are hot in Rome. Women are not flat-chested in Rome. Skirts are shorter in Rome. Nailheads, studs, bugle beads, and sequins with, yes, truly, little bits of fur—faux and/or real—can be found sewn to clothing and, hmm, even shoes.

The globalization of money and designer franchises means that Italian designers sell their lines all over their own country, most certainly in Rome, and in just about every other country as well. The line may be most fully shown in stores in Milan, but you can find an excellent selection of these designer clothes in Rome. In a few cases, the Rome store is better than the Milan store.

### Best Buys

Rome doesn't have any cheap best buys, unless you are ready to spring for Italian designer fashions, in which case everything is a best buy. Oops, I lied.

**Designer Fashions** You won't find too many designer bargains unless you hit a sale, but then things can really go your way. If you are bargain conscious, the best deals in Rome are at a few outlet shops (see below) or in the airport, which has a gigantic duty-free shopping area. If you are status conscious, these are best buys because the selection of styles in any given designer brand goes beyond what you'd find in other cities in the world.

Please note that items imported to Italy for sale at the duty-free shops at the airport (English sweaters, for example) are 19% cheaper than they are in a regular Italian store, but they are still outrageously expensive. Buy Italian when in Italy; forget everything else. Also note that not every store in the Rome Airport is a duty-free shop, even though it may look like one.

**Ties** I got caught up in how many status ties are for sale in various shops in Rome. Prices are less expensive than in the U.S. and the U.K. In fact, prices can be so low you may giggle. The average price of a power tie in New York, without



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New York State sales tax, is \$95 to \$135. The same ties in Rome cost 59€ to 100€ (\$65–\$110). You can even buy a power tie in Rome for 32€ (\$35). I kid you knot.

**Home Style** From Tad to Lisa Corti, the sexy colors and the mix of imported looks with Italian chic have arrived. This is mondo home style, from Asia, from sub-continent, and from all over shaken up with the Italian touch. Lisa Corti is sold at Saks Fifth Avenue, but the Italian prices—even in euros—are better than the U.S. prices. If you can't stand the colors, back into beige or monotonous in the bed line, from Frette or Pratesi.

### **Shopping Hours**

Hours in Rome are the same as in all of Italy, but Sunday is really loosening up. In fact, the department store La Rinascente is open on Sunday from noon to 5pm. Wonders never cease.

For normal retail days (Tues–Fri), shops open at 9:30am and close at 1 or 1:30pm for lunch. They reopen at 3:30pm in winter and at 4pm in summer. In the summer, stores stay open until 8pm. Because Romans (as do all Europeans) dine late, many people are out shopping until midnight. Do not let any hotel concierge or signpost lead you to believe that stores in Rome open at 9am—even if it says so on the door. This is Rome, remember?

If you don't like to give up shopping for lunch, the department stores and mass merchandisers stay open during these hours, and a growing number of high-end merchants are following suit. Fendi is open through lunch, as are many other stores on Via Borgognona and in the Spanish Steps area.

Now then, the odd days are Monday, Saturday, and Sunday. Some stores are closed Monday morning; in summer, they are often also closed Saturday afternoon. But that's not a rule. On my last Monday in Rome, I found that mass-market stores and chains are open by 10am on Monday. Designer shops open at 3:30pm on Monday. For Sunday shopping, stores that are open may close for lunch and then be open again from 4 to 7pm.

## Closed Out

Watch out for those August closures—some stores call it curtains, totally. Only madmen go to Rome in August. The sales are in July.

## Personal Needs

You will find neither grocery stores nor real-people department stores in the middle of the usual tourist shopping haunts, although there's a branch of **La Rinascente** and of **Upim** just near San Silvestro, close to the main tourist areas such as the Trevi Fountain and the Spanish Steps. But you have to know how to find them . . . or to even look for them.

Ask your concierge for the nearest pharmacy or grocery.

**Note:** The Centrale train station has a fabulous mall underneath it and can meet most needs. Rome has several dozen all-night pharmacies, including one at the airport. The pharmacy at the main train station is open until 11:30pm daily.

There are three branches of **Standa**—the Kmart-like department store locals rely on—in Rome; the one in Trastevere (Viale Trastevere 60) also has a supermarket. Upim stores are closing like mad.

Rome is more spread out than some of the other cities you'll visit; you may need to take a walk around your hotel to learn the whereabouts of your own minimart for buying water, snacks, and all those things that cost too much from your minibar.

## Special-Event Retailing

If you happen to be in Rome between December 15 and January 6, get yourself (and your kids) over to the Piazza Navona, where there is an annual Christmas fair. Stalls surround the large square and offer food, candies, and crafts. You can buy tree ornaments and crèches. **Warning:** Much of the Hong Kong-made merchandise is less expensive in the U.S. Stick to locally crafted items at the fair, and you won't get ripped off.

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Because Easter in Rome is also a big deal, there are more vendors in Vatican City at this time.

### Shopping Neighborhoods

**Spanish Steps/Condotti** No matter what season of the year, the Spanish Steps are so gorgeous that you can't help but be drawn to them. They are particularly magical because they lead to all the best big-name stores. Don't forget that there's an **American Express** office at the Steps, so when you run out of money on a shopping spree, you can get more without missing a beat, and then get right back to spending it.

The **Via Condotti** is the leading shopping street of the high-**rent Spanish Steps neighborhood**—but it is not the only game in town, or even on the block. The area between the Spanish Steps and the **Via del Corso** is a grid system of streets, all packed with designer shops.

**Via Condotti** has the most famous big names and is the equivalent of Rodeo Drive, but you'd be missing a lot of great stuff (and the American designer stores) if you didn't get to the side streets, all of which combine to make up the area I hereby name **Spanish Steps/Condotti**.

**Note:** There is one street that leads away from the Spanish Steps, the **Via del Babuino** (yes, it's the baboon street), which appears to be an equal spoke from the Steps but actually has a very different neighborhood feel to it, so I have separated it from the rest (see below).

If you have only a few hours to shop in Rome and you are seriously interested in designer fashion, your assignment, should you accept it or not, is to shop the **Spanish Steps/Condotti** area and to get to some of—or all of—the **Via del Babuino** and a block or two of the **Via del Corso** down at the **Condotti** end. By all means, make it into the recently refurbished **Fendi**, which is like an art gallery of creativity. If you can't stand all these fancy stores and have no need to be toting the next or newest **Gucci** bamboo handle, then head over to **Via Vittoria**, one of the tiny side streets in the area where many young and hip shops are having their day. My fave is **Il Baco da Seta** (no. 75).

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**Via Veneto** I know that every American in Rome has heard of the Via Veneto, if only from the movies. While I invariably stay at a hotel in this area, note that the shopping here is nothing to write home about or to go out of your way to visit. The large bookstalls on the street corners are handy for a vast selection of magazines (all languages) and supplies, from postcards to videos (yes, even dirty movies) to paperback bestsellers in English. There are some shoe shops and several glitzy cafes. It's a pleasant street to wander, but not exceptional. If you are staying in the area, you will probably enjoy the side streets more.

**Via Nazionale** This is a very long street, but its best parts—between Repubblica and Termini—have a slew of fashion shops for young women and a few big names. More and more big names are opening here, but you can now find Max Mara, Frette, and a few others. The Upim here has closed to make room for more fancy fare. Stay tuned.

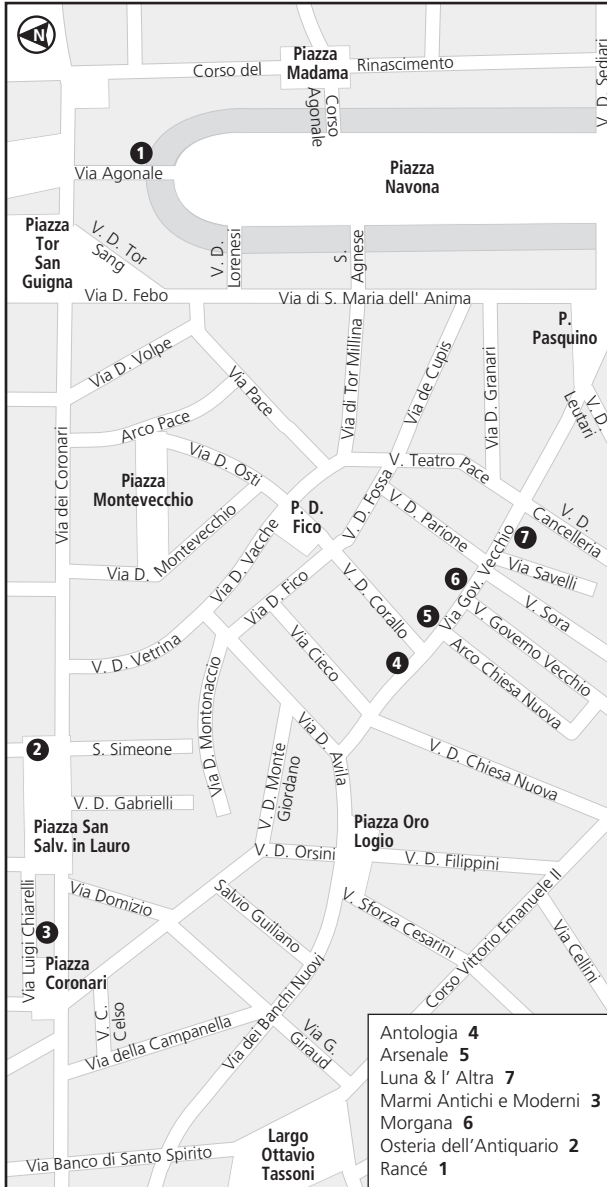
**Trevi** From the Spanish Steps, you can walk to the Trevi Fountain and segue into several “real-people” Rome neighborhoods. First hit **Via del Tritone**; both sides of the street have good offerings. See the listing below.

**Via dei Coronari** You say you like to stroll down medieval streets and look at antiques shops? Hmm. Well, guys, have I got a street for you. This particular street takes you back to a previous century, and has the best antiques stores in Rome. Located right around the corner from the Piazza Navona, the Via dei Coronari is very small; study your map first.

Walk down one side of the street and back up the other, an area of maybe 2 or 3 blocks. Some of the shops are extremely fancy salons with priceless pieces; others are a little funkier. Almost all of the dealers take credit cards. Those who don't speak English may speak French if your Italian isn't too good. The shop numbers will go to the middle 200s before you've seen it all; there are possibly 100 dealers here.

The dealers are very community minded and have their own block association that has various parties and promotions for the public. They've organized a few nights in May when the

# Via dei Coronari



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stores stay open late, and a party in October, also for late-night strolling and shopping (officially called the local **Antiques Fair**). Candles and torches light the way.

If you are looking for someplace super to eat in the midst of the antiques stores, try **Osteria dell'Antiquario**, Piazzetta di San Simeone (☎ 06/68-79-694). You can eat outdoors or in at this simple but elegant place that's also quite "in." Lunch for two costs about 73€ (\$80). Don't let the address throw you; it's right on the Via dei Coronari.

**Via del Corso** Via del Corso is a very long street; the part that you will be most interested in begins where Via del Tritone intersects it and extends all the way to Piazza del Popolo. Both sides of the street are lined with stores; many are branches of famous names, such as Frette or even Benetton, and many are stores that I just like for local color.

The really hot part of Via del Corso is right below the Spanish Steps in the area from Via Condotti to Piazza del Popolo, where you'll find all the fancy designer shops, a zillion teen shops (rock music blaring), and the new version of neon rock fashions for 14-year-olds—like **Onyx**.

**Via del Tritone** This is a big real-people shopping street that connects the Via del Corso and Spanish Steps area to the Via Veneto and Piazza Barberini area; it is also an extension of the Trevi neighborhood. At the top is the **Piazza Barberini**, with the Bernini Bristol Hotel and a metro stop. As you move down the street until it dead-ends into Via del Corso, you have a lot of regular shops with more moderate prices than the big-name designer shops 3 blocks away.

There is a large **La Rinascente** department store on the corner. If you walk a few blocks away from the Spanish Steps, you'll be at the Trevi Fountain, so to get your bearings, look at a map, and see that Via del Tritone is between Trevi and the Spanish Steps.

**Campo dei Fiori** Campo dei Fiori is one of those neighborhoods that is beginning to attract tourists and will certainly be ruined in no time at all; right now it is a genuine daily fruit

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and flower market that packs up by about 1pm. Get there mid-morning, browse the stalls and photograph the fruits, and then plop down at any of the dozen or so cafes nearby. There are also pizza places, if you don't want a 55€ (\$60) lunch.

Aside from the market, you are in the midst of an old Roman neighborhood, where rents are lower and fun shops are opening up. There are a number of food and cookware stores surrounding the Campo dei Fiori. Just a few blocks away is the Piazza Navona, where you can visit the **Rancé** soap shop and stroll around the piazza, of course. *Note:* There is no market at Campo dei Fiori on Sunday.

**Via del Governo Vecchio** This is sort of a hidden street, between the Piazza Navona and the Campo dei Fiori. Before you attempt to find it on foot, first try to locate it on a map. The street is dark, narrow, medieval, and blessed with a few vintage clothing shops. Some are the Army-Navy type; others sell serious vintage—I had my 45€ (\$50) Pucci triumph on this street, although the actual store where I got lucky is now gone.

Aside from the vintage stores, there are some cutting-edge fashion boutiques. I like **Morgana** (no. 27) and **Arsenale**; both are hot and happening. This neighborhood is easy to reach, is fun to shop, and gives you a less touristy perspective on Rome. Also be sure to take in **Antologia** (no. 49), for women's clothing, and **Luna & l'Altra** (no. 105). Luna sells Dries and Kenzo and style, for those who know what it means.

**Via Fontanella Borghese** Right now, this is still coming into its own as an extension of the Via Condotti on the other side of the Via del Corso. This street is quiet, unvisited by tourists, and home to several new branches of big-name designer shops, such as **Fendi** (no. 57). In this same quiet area is the new **Lisa Corti** store, Via di Pallacorda 14.

**Via del Babuino** Remember when I told you that Spanish Steps/Condotti had another part to it that was the same but different? Well, this is it. This is one of the antiques neighborhoods of Rome, and boasts some snazzy designer shops, too. It's a fun neighborhood, especially if you're just looking

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for furniture, paintings, or the hottest items in Europe these days: Art Deco tabletop accessories. I take it back—this is more than a fun neighborhood. This is a must-do.

Via del Babuino stretches from the Spanish Steps to Piazza del Popolo, and is filled with interior-design experts, antiques shops, and fabric and lighting showrooms, as well as a few leather-goods hot shots and designer somebodies. **Emporio Armani** (no. 13) begins the parade—although it is almost directly across the street from **Etro** (no. 102) at the beginning of the shopping windfall. Then comes **Chanel**, etc. Further along you'll get to **AJ** (no. 70A), which is Armani Jeans, the Italian version of AX, although not identical.

Don't forget that right off this street, where you least expect it, is one of the better designer discount stores of Rome, **Il Discount dell'Alta Moda** (Via di Gesù e Maria 16 and 14, the new men's shop). If you stay on Baboon Street, it dead-ends at the Piazza del Popolo and the **Hotel Russie**, which you must wander through. But before you can rest and relax at the hotel, be sure to hit **Tad** (no. 155a). For that matter, Tad also has a cafe.

**The Ghetto** This is a far cry from the Grand Hotel, but for those of you who want to stay in a fabulous hotel but then travel to the grittier parts of the city, you are off on a crazy adventure. Take a bus from the train station to the Vittoriano Emanuele monument and walk, or just taxi, right to the oldest part of Rome, where the ghetto was.

Take the **Via delle Botteghe Oscure** for 2 short blocks, note all the fabric jobbers (wholesalers), then turn left at the **Piazza Paganica**. You'll now enter a small neighborhood that seems very residential. Wander the weaving streets looking for the shops that interest you. This is the kind of adventure that is welcomed by a true *garmento*, someone who likes to see bolts of fabric piled up in store windows and doesn't care about fancy architecture or salespeople in matching uniforms. The area is charming, very old, crumbling, and undiscovered by tourists. All of these stores are jobbers; you'll find jeans and underwear and sweats and even a few jewelry stores. *Don't miss*: **Leone**



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**Limentani**, Via Portico d'Ottavia 47, a discounter with mounds of dishes and china—even Richard Ginori patterns.

**Via dei Cestari** If you're looking for a unique shopping experience, a unique gift, or just something special and different, after you visit the Pantheon (bad gift stalls), check out the Via dei Cestari, which is filled with ecclesiastical shops selling ribbons, robes, socks, and all sorts of fascinating supplies. Start at **De Ritis** (no. 48) and check out all the surrounding stores. Many also sell chalices and religious souvenirs.

### **Five Best Stores of Rome**

#### **IL BACO DA SETA**

*Via Vittoria 75 (metro: Spagna).*

Dropy and divine fashions in easy-to-wear silk in dreamy colors; also some accessories. Fair prices in the 136€ to 181€ (\$150–\$200) range.

#### **LUNA & L'ALTRA**

*Via del Governo Vecchio 105; no nearby metro.*

This store isn't much bigger than a walk-in closet, but it carries an international cadre of funky-chic names such as Issey Miyake and Dries Van Noten, and puts it all together in a look that is comfortable and fabulous.

#### **MARMI ANTICHI E MODERNI**

*Via dei Coronari 113–114 (no nearby metro).*

Maybe this store is only great to me—it is a matter of taste. While the store may at first seem like a tourist trap (TT) or at best a place that sells marble stuff you may or may not be interested in, stay a few seconds and find the fruit. It's very expensive (about 18€/€20 per piece), but it is so chic you could pass out.

#### **TAD**

*Via Babuino 155a (metro: Spagna).*

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Home style by the mile, even though it's not that hard-line Italian look. Ask them for the address of the stock shop, which was around the corner when I visited, but may have moved. There is a cafe, too.

**TERMINI ROMA MALL**

*Rome Main Train Station (metro: Termini).*

Perhaps you can never take the love of a mall out of the American heart. This is truly an American-style mall located underneath the main train station, but it has French and Italian stores and places to eat—and it is great fun. There's one shop devoted just to merchandise for race-car drivers and wannabes. There's a Sephora, the beauty supermarket. There is a real supermarket. There's everything. I love it here. Aboveground, on the main level, there's a tease of what's below—a Nike shop, a Benetton, a bookstore, etc.

**ALSO-RAN****LISA CORTI HOME TEXTILE EMPORIUM**

*Via di Pallacorda 14 (metro: Spagna).*

This store opened a month after I left Rome, but because I am such a Lisa Corti fan and because I have seen color pictures of this venue, I send you here with delight. It's right near the Piazza Fontanella Borghese, not too far from the Spanish Steps. Look for the look in any Saks Fifth Avenue catalog and compare prices.

**ROME RESOURCES FROM A TO Z****Antiques**

While I can't go so far as to suggest you actually buy antiques in Rome, this is the Italian center of fancy antiques shops. There are several streets where stores abound, including **Via del Babuino** and **Via dei Coronari** (see above). If you're shopping

## Rome Resources from A to Z 87

for serious antiques and looking for a dealer to trust, look for the gold seal representing the Associazione Romana Antiquari. Note that each fall, for 1 week, there's an antiques market at Pala Parioli, and the shops on Via dei Coronari are usually open at night.

### Beauty

#### AVEDA

*Rampa Mignanelli 9 (metro: Spagna).*

Although this address sounds screwy, actually “rampa” very well describes the fact that the shop is on a ramp to the Spanish Steps. This is an American brand, and prices are slightly higher in Rome than in the U.S., but it's a high-quality brand and good for travel sizes if you need products.

#### BEAUTY PLANET

*Grand Hotel Palace, Via Veneto 66–70 (metro: Repubblica).*

Full-service spa and beauty center. Closed Sunday.

#### SERGIO VALENTE

*Via Condotti 11 (metro: Spagna).*

Logan says this is the must-do salon if you need your hair done. It has been the “in” fashion hairstylist salon for 3 decades. Closed Monday. **Note:** Cash only.

### Books

The large news kiosks on the Via Veneto sell paperback books in many languages, including English.

#### FELTRINELLI

*Via VE Orlando 79–87 (metro: Repubblica).*

This is a famous chain with stores here and there in busy shopping districts. This one is divided into a few stores in a row, the **International** shop—with books in English—is at

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no. 87. There's also a ton of guidebooks and a wide selection of videos and DVDs of famous Italian movies. Yes, they even have *Flesh Gordon* [sic]. They are open on Sundays, 10am to 1:30pm and 4 to 7pm.

**LION BOOKSHOP & CAFÉ**

*Via dei Greci 33 (metro: Spagna).*

Located in the Spanish Steps shopping district, this store specializes in English-language books; they also have great stuff for kids. Closed Sunday and Monday.

**RIZZOLI ROMA**

*Largo Chigi 15;*

*Via Tomacelli 156 (metro: Spagna).*

Tomacelli is the larger of the two shops; both are open on Sunday at 10:30am until 1:30pm, and then 4 to 8pm. During the week, hours are nonstop. Italy's best bookstore with books in all languages.

**Cashmere****AMINA RUBINACCI**

*Via Bocca di Leone 51 (metro: Spagna).*

Visitors to Capri will know the name of this famed Neapolitan source that has recently opened a small shop in Rome specializing in cashmeres, but there are also cottons and cashmere blends. To die for.

**MALO**

*Via Bocca di Leone 79 (metro: Spagna).*

Flagship of the famed brand, which has home style, gift items, accessories, and more cashmere than you can dream of. They do have an outlet store (p. 158) located outside of Florence.

**SOLO CASHMERE**

*Via del Babuino 55a (metro: Spagna).*

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This is a small shop selling garments made of 100% Italian cashmere, which is of very high quality with very high price tags. Still, check out the sales and the selection of styles, which are both sublime.

**Cooking Classes****DIANE SEED**

*Via del Plebiscito 112.*

Call © 06/679-7103.

**FROM MARKET TO TABLE**

*Via dei Due Macelli 106.*

Jon Eldan (a baker) and Carla Lionello (a cook) offer assorted tours and cooking classes and workshops for food lovers, including a market-day workshop that runs from 9am to 2pm and costs 159€ (\$175) for two people, with lunch included. You can e-mail this young team for more information at [j.eldan@agora.stm.it](mailto:j.eldan@agora.stm.it) or call © 06/69-92-04-35 for information and reservations. While I haven't done their class, I did a similar one in France and loved it. I'd consider this a must-do for any foodie. Yes, of course, it's all done in English.

**Costume Jewelry****CASTELLI**

*Via Condotti 22 and 6 (metro: Spagna);*

*Via Frattina 18 and 54 (metro: Spagna).*

This small, wood-paneled shop is crammed with perfume, beauty supplies, and a wonderful collection of costume jewelry. Don't miss the variety of evening bags. I saw this fabulous hair contraption in chenille (sort of a chignon catcher), but it cost 91€ (\$100)—and that was when the value of the dollar was strong. The store at Via Condotti 22 is open non-stop (through lunch, that is).

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**CONSUELO BOZART**

*Via Bocca di Leone 4 (metro: Spagna).*

You can leave here with a collection of fake Art Deco and other costume jewelry. The styles and selection are great; this place is definitely worth the stop if you didn't get what you wanted in Florence. It's famous in designer circles.

### Department Stores

Italy doesn't have great department stores, and I don't suggest you go out of your way to shop in one. There are two that are somewhat convenient to mainstream tourist shopping: a branch of **La Rinascente** at Via del Corso 189; and a branch of **Coin** at Piazzale Appio, which is across the street from the Via Sannio market and may possibly be on your itinerary (if you are spending a week in Rome and can't stand to look at another fountain).

**Upim**, the dime-store version of an Italian department store (which may be a contradiction in terms), has stores at Via del Tritone 172 and Via Nazionale 211. The **Standa** at Viale Trastevere 60 has a supermarket downstairs.

### Designer Boutiques

#### CONTINENTAL BIG NAMES

**CARTIER**

*Via Condotti 83 (metro: Spagna).*

**CÈLINE**

*Via Condotti 20 (metro: Spagna).*

**CHANEL**

*Via del Babuino 98–100 (metro: Spagna).*

**ESCADA**

*Salita San Sebastianello 8 (metro: Spagna).*

**FOGAL**

*Via Condotti 55 (metro: Spagna).*

**Rome Resources from A to Z 91****HERMÈS**

*Via Condotti 60 (metro: Spagna).*

**KENZO**

*Via del Babuino 124 (metro: Spagna).*

**KOOKAI**

*Via Bocca di Leone 5 (metro: Spagna).*

**LOUIS VUITTON**

*Via Condotti 15 (metro: Spagna).*

**SWATCH**

*Via Condotti 33 (metro: Spagna).*

**UNGARO**

*Via Bocca di Leone 24 (metro: Spagna).*

**YVES SAINT LAURENT RIVE GAUCHE**

*Via Bocca di Leone 35 (metro: Spagna).*

**ITALIAN BIG NAMES****BENETTON**

*Piazza di Spagna 94 (metro: Spagna).*

**BOTTEGA VENETA**

*Piazza San Lorenzo 9 (metro: Spagna).*

**BRIONI**

*Via Condotti 21a (metro: Spagna).*

**BYBLOS**

*Via Borgognona 7 (metro: Spagna).*

**DOLCE & GABBANA**

*Piazza di Spagna 82–83 (metro: Spagna);*

*Via Borgognona 7d (metro: Spagna).*

**EMPORIO ARMANI**

*Via del Babuino 140 (metro: Spagna).*

**ETRO**

*Via del Babuino 102 (metro: Spagna).*

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**FENDI**

*Via Borgognona 36–49 (metro: Spagna);  
Via Fontanella di Borghese 57 (metro: Spagna).*

**FERRAGAMO**

*Via Condotti 73 (metro: Spagna).*

**GIANFRANCO FERRÉ**

*Via Borgognona 42 (metro: Spagna).*

**GIANNI VERSACE (MEN)**

*Via Borgognona 24 (metro: Spagna).*

**GIANNI VERSACE (WOMEN)**

*Via Bocca di Leone 26 (metro: Spagna).*

**GIORGIO ARMANI**

*Via Condotti 77 (metro: Spagna).*

**GUCCI**

*Via Condotti 8 (metro: Spagna).*

**LA PERLA**

*Via Condotti 79 (metro: Spagna).*

**LAURA BIAGIOTTI**

*Via Borgognona 43 (metro: Spagna).*

**LES COPAINS**

*Piazza di Spagna 32–35 (metro: Spagna).*

**MAX & CO.**

*Via Condotti 46 (metro: Spagna).*

**MAX MARA**

*Via Condotti 17–19 (metro: Spagna);  
Via Frattina 28 (metro: Spagna).*

**MISSONI**

*Piazza di Spagna 78 (metro: Spagna).*

**PRADA**

*Via Condotti 92–95 (metro: Spagna).*



**TRUSSARDI**

*Via Condotti 49 (metro: Spagna).*

**VALENTINO**

*Via Condotti 13 (metro: Spagna).*

**ZEGNA**

*Via Borgognona 7 (metro: Spagna).*

## Discounters

**DISCOUNT SYSTEM**

*Via Viminale 35 (metro: Repubblica).*

This store is possibly owned by the same people who own Il Discount Dell Alta Moda, or else it is just patterned after it. They have a very similar brochure and the same price system—that means to get the accurate price, you must deduct 50% from the marked price on the tag. So don't let the price tags throw you.

In terms of selection, Discount System is a larger store and has a much, much, much greater selection. I spent an hour here touching everything and trying to buy something but left empty-handed. But Barbara Lessona has bought tons of Prada. There's menswear, womenswear, shoes, handbags, luggage, belts, ties, dressy dresses, and every big-name Italian designer in some form or another. The clothes are at least a year old.

The location is convenient enough to make this a thought-provoking choice for bargain shoppers. It's around the corner from the Grand Hotel and down the street from the main train station; you can take the metro to Repubblica and walk. The same metro will also take you to Piazza di Spagna and the Spanish Steps.

I once began my morning here (the store does not open promptly at 9:30am, so take your time) then walked the few blocks to the metro and went on to Piazza di Spagna, where I shopped the Baboon Street and ended up at Via di Gesù e Maria for the other discount store. Seeing both discount stores in 1 day made it a brilliant experience.

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### IL DISCOUNT DELL'ALTA MODA

*Via di Gesù e Maria 16 and 14 (men's store; metro: Spagna).*

Both designer clothes and accessories are at discounted prices—the problem is lack of range, lack of sizes, and sometimes high prices (even at a discount, some of these prices will make you wince). **Important note:** The price is one-half of the price marked on the ticket. So if you are going to wince, do so accurately. The help may not speak English, and you may not feel comfortable with the system until you figure out how to read the price tags properly.

Now for the good news: There are plenty of big names and the store is easy to shop because it is arranged by color group. The handbags are probably the best deal.

The best news is the new men's store, two doors down, at no. 14. This huge store is well stocked and has many things that will fit women. While Armani jeans at 107€ (\$118) weren't my idea of a bargain, I wanted everything. There were men's suits in the far rear. The style and colors and sophistication are beyond compare.

### SHOCK STOCK

*Via della Farnesina 99–101 (no nearby metro).*

This is one of Barbara Lessona's finds. It's not far from Campo dei Fiori and carries brand-name clothes and cashmeres. It is open in August but closed Saturday afternoon during that month.

## Gifts

### FABRIANO

*Via del Babuino 173 (metro: Spagna).*

Another find from Milan, this store sells pens, writing goods, bound notebooks, and papers. There are some great gifts with tons of style for not much money.

## Gloves

### MEROLA

*Via del Corso 143 (metro: Spagna).*

This is the oldest glove shop in Rome and a far cry from much of the rest of the fare on Via del Corso, which nowadays seems to cater to teens. Yes, Audrey Hepburn's gloves in *Roman Holiday* came from here.

## Home Style

### C.U.C.I.N.A.

*Via Mario de Fiori, 68 (metro: Spagna).*

This store is actually similar to Pottery Barn or Crate & Barrel in the U.S. or even Conran's in London, but this is the Italian version. It's a must for foodies and those seeking gifts for cooks and gourmands; lots of little doodads. For those who have visited the store before, yes, this is a new address.

### FRETTE

*Piazza di Spagna 11 (metro: Spagna).*

This is a branch of the famous Italian linen house that sells both luxury linen and a hotel line, which is high quality but less expensive.

### TAD

*Via del Babuino 155a (metro: Spagna).*

### TAD'S STOCK

*Ask at regular store to verify it's still nearby (metro: Spagna).*

I first discovered Tad in Milan, and yes, this is a branch of the same store. However, the Rome store is better—more color, more whimsy—and the stock shop is tons of fun and located about a block away from the regular store. Much of the merchandise comes from Viet Nam and/or has an ethnic hint to

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it, but it's also very Mediterranean looking. Prices are fair; they are downright cheap at the Stock shop.

### Malls

#### CINECITTA'DUE SHOPPING CENTER

*Via Togliatti 2 (metro: Subaugusta-Cinecitta).*

My God, what is Rome coming to? It's an American-style shopping mall with more than 100 stores; open "nonstop." This mall is for locals; I cannot imagine why a tourist would visit, but there you go.

#### FORUM TERMINI

*Rome Termini Train Station (metro: Termini).*

Most of the mall is downstairs, but there are plenty of stores on the ground level, including a **Nike** and a **Benetton**. There's a branch of the makeup supermarket **Sephora** on the lower level, as well as a real supermarket that sells everything. There's a store that sells race-car-driving souvenirs and the usual stores for clothing, telephones, CDs, books, etc. If you haven't seen the brand **Bottega Verde**, this is a place to check it out—sort of the local version of The Body Shop.

#### ROMA DOWNTOWN

*Via di Propaganda 7a (metro: Spagna).*

This is a store with the concept of a mall—major brands and goodies all located under one roof. At least it's conveniently located near the Spanish Steps. It's for tourists and it is open on Sunday. Hours are unusual, so please note: Monday, Tuesday, and Thursday to Sunday 10am to 8pm; Wednesday 3 to 8pm. Popular with Japanese visitors.

### Markets

Although Rome's main flea market at Porta Portese is famous, I've never found it that good—except when I needed to buy extra luggage because I'd gone wild at Fendi. The biggie is held on

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Sunday from 6am to 2pm. You can get there at 8am and do fine; this is not like the Bermondsey Market in London, where you must be there in the dark with a flashlight in your hand. (In fact, in Rome, please go to flea markets only in daylight.) Officially called the **Mercato Di Porta Portese**; it stretches for about a mile along the Tiber River, where about 1,000 vendors are selling everything imaginable—a lot of which is fake or hot (or both). Enter the market about halfway down Viale Trastevere, where the old clothes are. This way you avoid miles of auto accessories. You can give it a miss as far as I am concerned.

The big news in Rome, though, is that “private” flea markets are popping up—real people just rent a table and sell off last year’s fashions or whatever turns up in grandma’s palazzo. Often the sellers are aristos or celebs. Check the Friday edition of the local newspaper *La Repubblica* for the weekend market schedule, listed under a heading called *Mercatini* (Markets) on the weekend’s “what’s happening” page.

Typically these events are held on Sunday, may cost 1.80€ to 7.30€ (\$2–\$8) to attend, and have a few hundred vendors. They do not open super early but struggle to open around 10am and are hottest from noon to 1pm; most are in areas off the beaten track and may require a bit of a taxi ride.

The newest flea is held monthly, beginning on Saturday afternoon (3–7pm) and running all day on Sunday, starting at 9am on the banks of the Tiber between Ponte Milvio and Ponte Duca d’Aosta. Most people call it the **Ponte Milvio Market**.

**Via Sannio** is a busy “real people” market area with all kinds of fabulous junk. Everything is cheap in price and quality. The goods are all new, no antiques. Many of the vendors who sell on Sunday at Porta Portese end up here during the week, so if you miss Sunday in Rome, don’t fret. Just c’mon over here. The crime problem (pickpockets) seems to be less during the week, also. There’s a **Coin** department store on the corner. You can get here by bus or metro; because it’s in a corner of central Rome, the taxi fare can be steep.

**Piazza Fontanella Borghese**, not far from the Spanish Steps, has 24 stalls selling prints, maps, books, coins, and some

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antiques. Good fun; a class act. Open Monday to Saturday 9am to 6pm, possibly later on summer evenings.

### Outlets

#### MACARTHUR GLEN OUTLETS

*Pontina, opening Oct 2003.*

#### TIMBERLAND FACTORY OUTLET

*Centro Commerciale Arcom, Via Orvietto 36 (no nearby metro).*

To drive, head south to Exit 27 (Torvaianica-Pomezia, Castelli Romani). © 06/91-60-22-37.

### Pharmacies & Soap Sellers

#### FARMACEUTICA DI SANTA MARIA NOVELLA

*Corso Rinascimento 47 (no nearby metro).*

Hmm, this isn't a traditional pharmacy, even though it calls itself a pharmacy. Yes, this is a branch of the famous Florentine address. They have expanded enormously in the past few years with stores in many European capital cities. This one, small and new, is a block from Piazza Navona. The salespeople do not speak English, but if you give it some time and some mime, you'll sample everything and figure it all out. The Weekend soap, for 9€ (\$10), is one of my favorite gifts.

#### RANCÉ

*Piazza Navona 53 (no nearby metro).*

This firm was from the south of France, where its ingredients originate, but it has since become Italian. Although most famous for its soap, it now has a full line of bath and beauty products as well as scents. The brand is sold mostly through catalogs in the U.S. but costs half the U.S. price when bought in the new shop in Rome. You'll have a wonderful time with the assortment and with making up gift baskets and packs. There

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is a booklet in English that explains the French origins of the goodies as well as all the properties of the line.

### Plus Sizes

#### ELENA MIRO/SORRISO

*Via Frattina 11 (metro: Spagna).*

Designed by Spanish maven Elena Miro, this line begins at size 46 (about a U.S. size 14). The store is a chain with stores popping up all over Europe selling chic and stylish work and play fashions for less money than Marina Rinaldi. Sort of in the Ann Taylor look and price league.

#### MARINA RINALDI

*Largo Goldoni 43 (metro: Spagna).*

A division of the design firm Max Mara, Marina Rinaldi is now a global brand with chic fashions for the large-size woman. The brand's sizing system is strange, so please try on before you buy. Even if you use the chart that compares Marina Rinaldi's sizes to American sizes, you may be in for a surprise. I wear a size 16 in American sizes, but according to the chart, I wear a 12 in American sizes, which in Marina Rinaldi's system is a size 21.

### Shoes & Handbags

There are scads of little shops selling leather goods all over Rome, and all over every other major Italian city, for that matter.

#### BOTTEGA VENETA

*Piazza San Lorenzo 9 (metro: Spagna).*

This gorgeous Bottega shop is new. It's across the way from the newer Louis Vuitton that has newly become luxe headquarters off of the Spanish Steps shopping district; it is hard to find unless you know where to look. Is the store worth finding? Well, yes. Prices are less than in the U.S., but there are no

## Papal Shopping

If you are on a quest for religious items (nonantique variety), a dozen shops surrounding St. Peter's Square offer everything you've been looking for. Most of the shops will send out your purchase to be blessed by the pope. Allow 24 hours for this service. Some of the stores will then deliver the items to your hotel; others ask you to return for them. If you are having items blessed, make sure you understand how you will be getting your merchandise back.

Merchandise ranges from the serious to the kitsch. Papal shopping falls into three categories: There are a number of gift stands and shops scattered throughout the Vatican; there is a string of stores in Vatican City; and there are vendors who sell from card tables on the sidewalks as you walk from the entrance/exit of the Vatican Museum (this way to the Sistine Chapel) to the front of St. Peter's.

Buy everything from the sublime to the ridiculous: Bart-Simpson-meets-the-pope T-shirts, rosaries, medals, glow-in-the-dark 3-D postcards—all tastes, all price ranges.

If you are a postcard freak, remember that Vatican City is an independent state; it has its own post office and its own stamps.

bargains here. That won't shock anyone, as Bottega has never had inexpensive merchandise, anyway. The store has two levels and many collections, and is to drool for.

### FRAGIACOMO

*Via Condotti 35 (metro: Spagna).*

This store has goods for him and her, and high-quality goods at that, with prices closer to 90€ (\$100) than 180€ (\$200), which is more the average for this kind of quality. Many of the looks are adaptations of the current faves—a Chanel-style pump, etc. There are many low-heeled, fashionable styles as well as ballet flats for 90€ (\$100), which isn't the lowest price



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in Rome but is pretty good. This is one of those bread-and-butter resources.

**FRATELLI ROSSETTI**

*Via Borgognona 69 (metro: Spagna).*

The Rossetti brothers are at it again—shoes, shoes, shoes, and now at somewhat affordable prices. There are men's and women's shoes as well as belts and even some clothes.

**TOD'S/HOGAN**

*Via Borgognona 45 (metro: Spagna).*

Tod's is significantly less expensive in Italy than in the U.S. Although the scene started with the driving shoe, the cult is so well established that now there's the Hogan line of sports shoes, high heels in the Tod's line, and very fancy (and expensive) leather handbags. Shoes begin at around 182€ (\$200). Note that this brand used to be called jpTod's but has now streamlined to simply Tod's.

**Teens****DIESEL**

*Via del Corso 184 (metro: Spagna).*

This Italian firm sells jeans and other casual clothing items, a must-do for the local scene and the perfect gift for any blue-jeans snob. The Style Lab is upstairs.

**ONYX**

*Via del Corso (metro: Spagna).*

There's another Onyx on the Via Frattina and stores all over the world; this Roman flagship is a block deep and lined with video screens, blue neon lights, teenage girls, and copies of the latest looks re-created into inexpensive clothing and trends. Even if you buy nothing and know no teens, come by just to wander around and marvel at what has happened to civilization.

## ROME ON A SCHEDULE

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### TOUR 1: ROMAN HOLIDAY

Knowing your way around Rome is great; browsing all the stores between the Exedra Hotel and the Piazza Navona is fun. But let's get small.

The best designer shopping in Rome is in the Spanish Steps area, and what you really need is a good understanding of how to tackle that vicinity. Essentially, what you should do is walk up and down every street from the Via Frattina to the Via Vittoria, between the Via del Corso and the Piazza di Spagna, including the fabulous Via del Babuino, which shoots off beside the Piazza di Spagna heading to the Piazza del Popolo. Should you be a little sick of the big names, concentrate on the Via Vittoria and the Via del Babuino.

If you are thorough and really enjoy each of the shops, you can probably do this in a week. If you are swift, you'll do it in a day. If you are desperate, you can manage in a half day. Obviously, you'll just go into those stores that beckon you.

Once you reach Piazza del Popolo, make sure you walk back toward the Spanish Steps on the Via del Corso. That's after you have peeked at the **Hotel de Russie**, of course.

**Via del Corso** Forgive me for raving, but I think this is tons of fun. It's a "real people" shopping street with normal stores, lots of locals, and a lot of teenage shops. You may even find the Via del Corso refreshing, after you've seen the high prices in the tony shops along the Via Condotti.

**Via dei Due Macelli** This one runs parallel to the Via del Corso, but at the top of the shopping trapezoid, so it bumps into the Spanish Steps. This is a more upscale street than the Via del Corso. It is considered a fine address, harking back to the immediate post-World War II years. **Pineider** has a shop here (no. 68), one of their nicest shops in all of Italy for paper goods, office items, and stationery chic. The Via dei Due Macelli runs right into the **Piazza di Spagna**, so it's a good path to walk if you are

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coming from the Via del Tritone. If you're hungry for home, don't miss **McDonald's** (no. 46), which is hard to find because it does not have a big sign and is hidden in a pseudo-villa.

**Via Frattina** This is the first serious shopping street, as you approach from the Via del Tritone area. It is very different from the rest of the Spanish Steps streets, because it still has reasonably priced stores on it and is by no means as hoity-toity as the rest of the neighborhood. Among the finds are two identical **Castelli** shops—perfumeries that sell lots of hair clips, earrings, costume jewelry, and fun doodads.

**Via Borgognona** This is now the best of the Spanish Steps streets, although shopkeepers on the Via Condotti may argue otherwise. I like it best because it's low-key but luxe; it's also home to restaurant **Nino**. Whether you shop Fendi or not, you must see this store; consider it an art gallery and cultural experience.

**Via Condotti** This is the best-known shopping street of Rome with the most famous names on it. It is an old-fashioned area and still has many of the big-time shops, where you should at least check the windows. Over the years Max Mara has bought up most of the storefronts, so the space goes on forever. But then there's Gucci, Prada, etc.

**Via Vittoria** This is the funkiest of the streets; I think the best in providing a sense of discovery. **Il Baco da Seta** (no. 75)—the kiss of silk—is here for droopy clothes in mid-range prices with tons-o-style (see “Five Best Stores of Rome,” p. 85).

**TOUR 2: BACK-STREETS SHOPPING TOUR**

This tour assumes you have already done Tour 1 and shopped your heart out in the nirvana of Italian big-name retail around the Spanish Steps area. If you didn't finish that tour, you can piggyback it onto this tour as the first part.

1. Walk along the Via del Corso from where it begins at the Piazza del Popolo. Within a block you'll be surrounded by shops that specialize in the Italian version of the American look. If you

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have teens with you, be prepared to spend. If you haven't had a shot at the Italian version of Loehmann's yet, then make a quick detour on Via di Gesù e Maria and pop into the discount designer shop at no. 16, and then into its other part, No. 14. Then hop right back onto Via del Corso and continue walking. Don't miss **T-store** (no. 203), which is the young-people store from Trussardi.

2. When you get to the Piazza San Lorenzo, which is right near the Plaza Hotel, hang a right. You'll see a cinema, but since you are on a shopping tour, instead head for **Deco** (Piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina 2), a knickknack designer store where even if you don't smoke you'll have to marvel at the ashtrays and other objects.
3. At the end of this piazza, tuck into the left on Via Campo Marzio and enjoy the tiny shops and workshops that make Italy what it is.
4. Curve around the little streets, shopping wherever you please until you hit the Piazza Navona. Should you get lost in this area of old-fashioned cobblestones, just ask for the Piazza Navona. If you do not mind paying 12€ (\$13) for an ice cream (ouch!), you can sit down at one of the cafes on the piazza for a break. You can shop the tourist stalls, have your caricature painted, or keep on moving right through to the end of the piazza to cross the Corso Vittorio Emanuele II.
5. Once across the street, you are walking straight, but the street is now named Via Baullari; it leads you directly to the Campo dei Fiori. Ready for lunch? *Si!*