

Things To Know Before Visiting Rome:

1. Kids under the age of 10 ride the metro for FREE. If you're traveling with children, you don't need to pay for them to use public transportation! This can add up to a nice savings when traveling with children.

2. Speaking of public transport, you need to purchase tickets prior to boarding. Purchase from the tabacchi (tobacco shop), select supermarkets or kiosks at the metro and train stations. We purchased tickets at the same time we grabbed an Italian SIM card. You can't purchase tickets while on the bus or metro.

Since tickets aren't considered in use until validated, you can purchase tickets in advance, then validate them (in the yellow machines) when you need to use the transportation. Tickets are valid for 75 minutes, so you can change buses within that time frame. You can also use the same ticket for the metro and bus.

Take a look at the ATAC website for more purchasing locations.

3. The airport is fairly far from the city center, about 30 km (20 mi). From the airport you can take the more touristy Leonardo Express Airport Train to Termini Station for 14€ or \$16. But, you'll find the locals taking the regional train for about half the cost. The regional train makes multiple stops, so you can get off at the stop closest to your lodging. Keep in mind that you may need to jump on the metro or even grab a cab to complete the final leg to your hotel.

Taxi's can be expensive, but the City of Rome has set rates for visitors traveling from the airport. You can see all the rates on the Aeroporti di Roma website. You should expect to pay 48€ to get to the center of Rome or within the Aurelian walls from FCO. The nice thing about the set taxi rate is the price includes luggage and up to four passengers. As always with set fares, make sure the taxi driver knows you are aware of the fare rate before jumping in the cab. Even though it's illegal to charge more, you don't want to get scammed. There are also fake taxi's that prey on unsuspecting tourists. You should look for white taxi's with the taxi sign on top, an ID# and meter, before jumping in.

Plan your transportation from the airport to your hotel prior to arrival. Ensure you take into account added costs such as taxi fare from one of the train stops to your hotel or the Metro fare for one of the legs. Factor in these costs and the amount of luggage you'll be hauling before leaving home.

Have cash on hand to cover these costs! You can hit the ATM while inside the airport.

4. Don't get caught without a bottle of water. Water peddled to tourists is ridiculously expensive. You can pay between 1.50€ - 2€ for the equivalent of a 12 oz bottle of water from a street vendor! The same bottle of water will cost you 1€ at a corner store. Better yet, head to a grocery store and pay just 0.19€ for a 1.5L bottle! There are also fountains throughout the city with potable water

from which you can fill a reusable bottle while visiting the sites. Just avoid aqua non-potabile or non-potable water.

Learn the water fountain trick

You'll find there are loads of water fountains dotted around the city, with water flowing freely all day and night. It's free and delicious and I encourage you to drink as much of it as possible. You may notice the drinking fountains have a spout with a hole in the top. Block the end of the spout with your palm and the water will shoot out of the hole, making it easy for you to drink. It's also worthwhile, then, to carry an empty water bottle with you to refill as you need

5. Do not, I repeat, Do not take a rose from anyone on the street. Even a cute child. Do not allow them to slip it in your purse or pocket. Do not pick it up if they drop it in front of you. Firmly say "no" and continue walking. They will try to charge you for the flower even if they tricked you into accepting it.

A firm "no" also works for the pesky salesman congregating around the main attractions trying to unload their selfie sticks and umbrellas. Just keep repeating "no" to each one as you pass. They will surround you, so just be firm and keep moving.

6. You pay for table service in Italy. If you're visiting Italy for the first time, you may be surprised to learn that you will pay a coperto for sitting down at the table to eat. It's just the way it is.

The coperto rate is more in touristy areas, but the average is 1.50€ per person. If you want to avoid a coperto, stand at the counter to drink your café or grab a pizza to go.

You may also find a servizio charge listed as a percent of your bill which is usually 10-20%. This is a service charge to the wait staff. We didn't see this often in Italy except at restaurants along the tourist tracks.

The price of the coperto and servizio will be listed in tiny print at the top, bottom or on the back of the menu. Make sure you take a look at this fee before sitting down. You may also see signs that state servizio e coperto incluso or service and cover included, so you'll know there won't be additional charges after your meal. Lastly, keep an eye out for a pane or bread charge. Usually if the waiter brings bread out to you automatically, they aren't charging extra or it's already included with the coperto. Sometimes stated as pane e coperto on the menu.

7. Don't be afraid to speak up if your bill is wrong. Always get an itemized receipt when paying for your meal and read it carefully. Know what you are being charged for. We were in Siena recently and I ordered the plate of the day. It came with an entree, wine, water and coffee for a set price. I received the bill and was charged for my water and the coffee. It may have only been a few euros, but I had them take it off.

While you will generally have a good experience eating in Rome, there are thousands of tourists that descend on the city daily. It's easy to see why some places seek to take advantage. Overall, you should have a lovely dining experience if you avoid the "hot" spots. Just keep these little extra's in mind.

8. Tipping is not mandatory or expected in Europe as it is in the US. Italian waitstaff are paid a respectable wage including benefits. If Italians leave a tip, it's a few euros or rounding up of the bill. A 5 - 10% tip from an American is more than enough for great service or if you're child made a particularly large mess. Do NOT tip on top of a servizio and remember that a tip is not required. I usually tip around 5% for good service. Even that is still hard on my American programmed brain.

9. Another ordering tip. If you order an appetizer, you will likely be asked if you want it "for three" (or however many are in your party) or "for the table." They are asking you if you want an appetizer for each person. Like many American's, we will order one appetizer to share before our meal. If you order "for the table" you will end up with the 4€ bruschetta being brought out to each person at the table. If there are four in your party, that inexpensive appetizer will now cost you 16€ when the bill comes out. OUCH! Specify that you want one or the "antipasto for two" even if there are 3 or 5 of you at the table.

10. Choose accommodations carefully. There is no shortage of accommodations in Rome. You will find hotels, apartments and hostels to suite all budgets. The biggest challenge is finding a property in a good location. While the train, metro and bus systems are extensive, we find it much easier to stay near the center. You will pay less if you stay outside the city walls, but I always prefer the convenience of staying "in the middle of it all."

While the most of the main sights are within a relatively small area, the actual historical center of Rome is quite large. It's divided into several districts that all have something unique to offer visitors. When booking accommodations, don't just rely on the fact that the hotel boasts it's in the historical center. You need to know WHERE in the center it's located. Look at the location in relation to the places you want to visit.

11. Pay to pee. While those who have traveled in other European countries are already aware of this fact, I thought it may be a new concept for newbies on the continent. You must pay to use public restrooms. The fee is 1€ in Rome. Children are free. Or you can just head into one of the MANY MacDonal'd's locations to save your change.

12. Avoid driving in Rome, if possible. Moped drivers zip around cars without a seemingly second thought to their own safety. Horns are blaring, lanes mean nothing and no one seems to have an ounce of patience behind the wheel. We picked up our rental car at the train station to drive to Florence and I nearly had a panic attack trying to navigate through the streets. If at all possible, just don't do it.

13. As with all major cities, pick pocketing is a real threat. Mind your belongings at all times. Don't put your bag on the ground unattended and don't carry large amounts of cash. Gypsies are also commonplace in Rome. Men, women and children are taught to pray on tourists. While I've heard stories about women throwing their babies at tourists so they drop their bags, I always thought it was an exaggeration until we spoke with the property manager of the apartment we

rented during our October visit. She was giving her standard speech to us about safety in Rome and she said that these things really do happen.

Bottom line, be vigilant when you are in crowded areas and using public transportation. It's a major city after all. You will be crammed next to strangers, so sneaking your wallet could be easier than you may think. Luckily we haven't had an issue, but I try to be cautious while still enjoying our travels.

But don't let that deter you!

Yes, there are scams and pickpockets. But that doesn't mean you should feel scared visiting Rome. It is a beautiful city and the locals are amazing. Scammers take advantage of people who are unsuspecting and unaware, so if you stay switched on and alert, you'll be just fine. Trust your instincts and never let a fear of being impolite stop you from following those instincts.

Skip the tourist spots

Don't be afraid to wander the little back streets of Rome and let it take you on a journey. Yes, of course you want to see the big tourist spots, but also allocate yourself some time to just wander. Stop in at bakeries and cafes, explore local boutiques and markets, buy fresh fruit from a local farmers market and just let it all soak in. The magic of Rome happens out on the streets, with the locals buzzing past on mopeds and that beautiful language wrapping itself around your ears.

Carry cash

It may be hard for you to pay for everything by credit card or traveller's card, so carry cash with you. As per above, pickpockets are around so I don't recommend carrying large amounts of cash on you, especially in your pockets etc. My advice would be to set a daily spend budget and carry that amount of money on you only. If there are two of you, split it up between you. Hide some of it in your shoe etc.

14. Wear comfortable shoes. While you may dream of strutting the streets in your stilettos, Rome isn't the place for heels. The old cobblestone streets are no place to wear anything but flats. Breaking your ankle will put quite a damper on your travels.

Also, it's not a good idea to walk into a church in your mini dress or those weird shorts that go up between your butt cheeks. Just saying. To get around this, pack a scarf or two in your day back so you can cover your shoulders and/or wrap it around your waist to add length to shorts and skirts if needed.

15. Learn basic Italian phrases. You don't have to be linguist to travel, but it's a good idea to learn a few basic words. Greeting someone in their native language is simply a sign of respect. We've found that a little bit of effort goes a long way.

Buon giorno = Good morning/Good afternoon

Buona sera = Good evening

Buonanotte = Goodnight

Ciao = Hello/Goodbye

Arrivederci = Goodbye

Grazie = Thank you

Prego = You're welcome

Per favore = Please

Sì = yes

No = No

Mi scusi = Excuse me/Pardon me

Parla inglese? = Do you speak English

The above phrases are just a few basics to help you get through your trip. If you have time, learn more. Traveling is always a great time to increase your awareness of new languages and cultures.

16. Save money by purchasing the **Rome & Vatican Pass** before your trip.

The OMNIA Vatican & Rome Card is a sightseeing pass that gives holder free entry to top attractions in Rome and the Vatican City as well as a Fast Track Entry, a hop-on-hop-off bus tour, free guidebook and travelcard. Tailor-made for visitors to the city, tourists can save both time and money during their time in Rome.

What's included:

Free entry to Vatican Museums & Sistine Chapel - plus a free Wi-Fi downloadable audio guide for St Peter's Basilica

Free entry to your choice of 2 out of 6 top Rome attractions including The Coliseum, Roman Forum & Palatine Hill, Capitoli Museums, Borghese Gallery and National Museum of Castel Sant'Angelo

Fast Track Entry to St Peter's Basilica, Sistine Chapel & The Coliseum - save over 4 hours at each attraction during busy periods

Free hop-on-hop-off bus tour ticket of Rome for 3 days

Free travelcard for unlimited access to Rome's public transport system

Free detailed Guidebook to help plan the perfect trip

Discounted Entry to another 30 plus sights, attractions and museums in Rome

Click here to see current prices and savings offers. Having the fast track entry will be a **HUGE** time saver during the busy seasons - the lines get super long.

Rome is a city unlike any other. It's chaotic and enchanting at the same time. With a little forethought, planning and a good map, you too just might find that Rome captures your heart. And who knows, if you throw a coin in the Trevi Fountain, you may find the tale to be true and visit the city again one day.