



Connoisseur's Rome

Art & architecture: lesser-known, off the beaten track and private visits

23–28 February 2026 (MM 885)

£3,620 • 6 days

Speaker: Dr Michael Douglas-Scott

Great art which is difficult to access, rarely open to the public or opened out of hours specially for this tour.

Private visit to the Sistine Chapel, shared with participants travelling on *Essential Rome*.

A unique and privileged picture of Rome in its eras of greatest splendour – medieval, Renaissance, Baroque, Neo-Classical.

As appealing to those new to the city as to frequent visitors.

Rome is the city of eternal re-invention. From being the largest and grandest city in the world, the capital of the Roman Empire dwindled to become a tiny, fractious fragment of its former glory. But Rome re-established itself amid the ancient ruins as the centre of western Christendom and seat of the papacy. *Quanta Rome fuit ipsa ruina docet*: that which Rome was, its ruin teaches.

Popes and princes of the Church relaunched the idea of the Eternal City. In terms of temporal power and artistic accomplishment (if not, on the eve of the Reformation, of spiritual authority) this process culminated in the High Renaissance of the early 16th century. Artists were drawn from all over Italy and beyond for this *Renovatio Urbis*. Bramante, Raphael and Michelangelo were key players but there were uncountable others. The ancient Basilica of St Peter began to be rebuilt and the Vatican Palace enlarged and dazzlingly refurbished. With the Sack of Rome in 1527 came a pause, but the city recovered later in the century as the Counter-Reformation gathered steam. Then came the Baroque, the first global style, of which Rome was the progenitor and centre.

The buildings and artworks selected date largely from the High Middle Ages to the 18th century. We rediscover some of Rome's hidden riches and experience its familiar masterpieces either in private sessions or at quieter times of the day. The climax is the exclusive visit to the Sistine Chapel, after public opening hours and free from the madding crowd.

Among the other places visited by special arrangement are the Palazzo Colonna, one of the great Roman baronial family palaces with its magnificent Baroque gallery, and Palazzo della Cancelleria. The flowering of the



Rome, Vatican Library, wood engraving c. 1880.

Baroque culminates in the achievement in both sculpture and architecture of the presiding genius of 17th-century Rome, Gianlorenzo Bernini.

This tour provides a unique and privileged picture of Rome in its greatest era of splendour since Antiquity. The hotel chosen befits this; a former Baorque Monastery, beautifully restored into a modern hotel.

Itinerary

Day 1. Fly at c. 12.45pm (British Airways) from London Heathrow to Rome Fiumicino.

Day 2. See the stunning collection of sculpture and painting in the Villa Borghese and visit the 16th-century Villa Medici, now the seat of the French Academy. The 'Holy of Holies', the Sancta Sanctorum, was the private chapel of the medieval popes at the Lateran palace and was inaccessible for centuries. It was rebuilt in the 1278 by the Cosmati firm with frescoes and mosaics which prefigure the Renaissance. Also see Michelangelo's *Moses* on Julius II's tomb in the church of S. Pietro in Vincoli.

Day 3. Bernini's own favourite among his churches was S. Andrea al Quirinale; compare it with Francesco Borromini's nearby S. Carlo alle Quattro Fontane. The Palazzo Farnese,

Built under the direction of Sangallo the Younger, Michelangelo, Vignola and Giacomo Della Porta, is one of the most important High Renaissance palaces in Rome. In the evening there is the private visit to the Vatican to see the Sistine Chapel. With Michelangelo's ceiling fresco, his *Last Judgement* on the end wall, the quattrocento wall frescoes and Raphael's frescoes in the Stanze, this is the most precious assemblage of painting in the western world.

Day 4. Private visits to two palaces today: Palazzo Colonna is an agglomeration of building and decoration of many centuries, and has a collection which includes works by Bronzino, Veronese and Annibale Carracci. The Grand Gallery is surely one of the most magnificent secular rooms in Europe. The ceiling fresco by Guido Reni in the Casino dell'Aurora in the garden of the Palazzo Pallavicini Rospigliosi is one of the greatest works of 17th-century classicism. The church of S. Ignazio has a simply amazing illusionistic ceiling painting by Andrea del Pozzo.

Day 5. Palazzo della Cancelleria, begun in 1485 by Cardinal Raffaele Riario, is a masterpiece of Early Renaissance secular architecture and has frescoes by Vasari of the life of Pope Paul III. Santa Maria in Trastevere is said to be one of the first churches in Rome in which Mass was celebrated, and has impressive 13th-century mosaics by Pietro Cavallini.

Day 6. Palazzo Doria Pamphilj holds a famous picture collection (early Caravaggios and Velasquez's terrifying *Pope Innocent X*). There is some free time before the flight; arrive at London Heathrow c. 7.00pm.

The tour is dependent on the kindness of many individuals and organisations, some of whom are reluctant to make arrangements far in advance, so the order of visits outlined above may change and there may be substitutions for some places mentioned.

Lecturer

Dr Michael Douglas-Scott mixes scholarship with accessible discourse, wit with reasoned opinion, and is highly sought-after as an art history lecturer. He has lectured for York University (London campus) and Birkbeck College, University of London, specialising primarily in 16th-century Italian art and architecture. He studied at the Courtauld and Birkbeck College and lived in Rome for several

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years. He has written articles for *Arte Veneta*, *Burlington Magazine* and the *Journal of the Warburg & Courtauld Institutes*.

Practicalities

Price. Two sharing: £3,620 or £3,410 without flights. **Single occupancy:** £4,130 or £3,920 without flights.

Included: flights (Euro Traveller) with British Airways (Airbus 320); travel by private minibus; hotel accommodation; breakfasts; 1 lunch and 3 dinners with wine, water, coffee; all admissions, including a private visit to the Vatican Museums; all tips for waiters, drivers and guides; all taxes; the services of the lecturer.

Accommodation. Donna Camilla Savelli, Rome (vretreats.com/donna-camilla-savelli): a pleasingly restored former baroque monastery, now 4-star hotel, set at the foot of the Janiculum hill in Trastevere. *Single rooms throughout are doubles for sole use.*

How strenuous? This is a particularly strenuous tour. Unavoidably, there is a lot of walking, as the historic area is vast, and vehicular access is increasingly restricted. Minibuses are used on some occasions but otherwise the city is traversed on foot. There is a lot of standing in museums and churches. A good level of fitness is necessary. It should not be attempted by anyone who has difficulty with everyday walking and stair-climbing. Average distance by minibus per day: 9 miles.

Group size: between 9 and 19 participants.