

# Nice

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With its unusual mix of real-city grit, old-world opulence, year-round sunshine and exceptional location, Nice's appeal is universal. Everyone from backpackers to romance-seeking couples and families will love sitting at a cafe on cours Saleya in Vieux Nice or a bench on the legendary Promenade des Anglais for an epic sunset. Eating options are some of the best you'll find in France, the nightlife is buzzing and the art scene thriving. You could happily spend a week here and still be hungry for more. Read more:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/france/nice#ixzz3EvrKKI00>

## Nice

The capital of the Riviera and fifth largest city in France, **Nice** lives off a glittering reputation. Far too large to be considered simply a beach resort, it has all the advantages and disadvantages of a major city: superb culture, shopping, eating and drinking, but also crime, graffiti and horrendous traffic, all set against a backdrop of blue skies, sparkling sea and sub-tropical greenery kept lush by sprinklers.

Popularized by English aristocrats in the eighteenth century, Nice reached its zenith in the *belle époque* of the late nineteenth century, and has retained its historical styles almost intact: the medieval rabbit warren of **Vieux Nice**, the Italianate facades of **modern Nice** and the rich exuberance of **fin-de-siècle residences** dating from when the city was Europe's most fashionable winter retreat. It has mementos from its time as a Roman regional capital, and earlier still, when the Greeks founded the city. The **museums** are a treat for art lovers, and though its politics are conservative Nice doesn't feel stuffy; it has a highly visible lesbian and gay community and spirited nightlife. Of late Nice has been

smartening up its act with extensive **refurbishment** of its public spaces and the construction of an ultra-modern **tramway**. Conservative it may be, but Nice does not rest on its laurels.

Read more:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/c%3%b4te-dazur/nice/#ixzz3EvrRjEpZ>

## Vive la France

France seduces travellers with its unfalteringly familiar culture, woven around cafe terraces, village-square markets and lace-curtained bistros with their plat du jour chalked on the board.

### Lyrical Landscape

And then there is the terroir (land) and the varied journey it weaves from northern France's cliffs and sand dunes to the piercing blue sea of the French Riviera and Corsica's green oak forests. Outdoor action is what France's lyrical landscape demands – and there's something for everybody. Whether you end up walking barefoot across wave-rippled sand to Mont St-Michel, riding a cable car to glacial panoramas above Chamonix, or cartwheeling down Europe's highest sand dune, France does not disappoint. Its great outdoors is thrilling, with endless endless and the next adventure begging to be had. Allez!

### Why I Love France *By Nicola Williams*

I moved to France in 1996 and have no intention of moving elsewhere – French art de vivre is just too good. Arriving in Lyon in winter, I whittled away endless blue-sky days devouring the city's ravishing art museums and street markets, delving into backstreet alleys and traboules, and gorging on oysters and white Côtes de Rhône every Sunday morning on my favourite cafe terrace in front of the mairie. Road trips to Beaujolais, Burgundy and the French Alps formed perfect

weekends away, punctuated with feasts so fabulous – some very simple, some gastronomic – that I vowed to eat my way around the rest of France.

### **Cultural Savoir-Faire**

France is about world-class art and architecture, outstanding museums, Roman temples and Renaissance châteaux. It seduces with both iconic landmarks known the world over and rising stars yet to be discovered. This country's cultural repertoire is staggering – in volume and diversity. And this is where the beauty of la belle France lies: when super stars like Mademoiselle Eiffel, royal Versailles and the celebrity-ridden French Riviera have been ticked off, there's still plenty more to thrill. (France is, after all, the world's top tourist destination, with more than 80 million visitors a year.)

### **Gastronomic Art de Vivre**

Food is of enormous importance to the French, and each region has its own specialities alongside French classics. The daily culinary agenda takes no prisoners: breakfasting on warm croissants from the boulangerie, stopping off at Parisian bistros, and shopping at the market are all second nature to the French – and it really would rude to refuse. But French gastronomy goes far deeper than just eating exceedingly well. Its experiential nature means there is always something tasty to observe, learn and try, wherever you are – be it flipping crepes in Brittany or chinking Champagne flutes in ancient Reims cellars, the culinary opportunities are endless.

### **Enjoying French Lifestyle**

The rhythm of daily life – dictated by the seasons in the depths of la France profonde (rural France) – exudes an intimacy that gets under your skin. Don't resist. Rather, live the French lifestyle. Embrace the luxury of simple,

everyday rituals being transformed into unforgettable moments, be it a coffee and croissant in the Parisian cafe where Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir met to philosophise, a stroll through the lily-clad gardens Monet painted, or a walk on a beach in Brittany scented with the subtle infusion of language, music and mythology brought by 5th-century Celtic invaders.

Read more:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/france#ixzz3EvpEQX>  
[p0](#)

## **France**

Croissants and châteaux, prehistoric caves and bubbling Champagne .

The sheer physical diversity of France would be hard to exhaust in a lifetime of visits. Places to visit in France range from the fretted coasts of Brittany and the limestone hills of Provence to the canyons of the Pyrenees and the half-moon bays of Corsica, and from the lushly wooded valleys of the Dordogne and the gentle meadows of the Loire valley to the glaciated peaks of the Alps. Each region looks and feels different, has its own style of architecture, its own characteristic food and often its own dialect. Though the French word *pays* is the term for a whole country, people frequently refer to their own region as *mon pays* – my country – and this strong sense of regional identity has persisted despite centuries of centralizing governments, from Louis XIV to de Gaulle.

Industrialization came relatively late to France, and for all the millions of French people that live in cities, the idea persists that theirs is a rural country. The importance of the land reverberates throughout French culture, manifesting itself in areas as diverse as regional pride in local cuisine and the state's fierce defence of Europe's agricultural subsidies. Perhaps the most striking feature of the French countryside is the sense of space. There are huge tracts of woodland and

undeveloped land without a house in sight, and, away from the main urban centres, hundreds of towns and villages have changed only slowly and organically over the years, their old houses and streets intact, as much a part of the natural landscape as the rivers, hills and fields.

Despite this image of pastoral tranquillity, France's history is notable for its extraordinary vigour. For more than a thousand years the country has been in the vanguard of European development, and the accumulation of wealth and experience is evident everywhere in the astonishing variety of **places to visit**, from the Dordogne's prehistoric cave paintings and the Roman monuments of the south, to the Gothic cathedrals of the north, the châteaux of the Loire, and the cutting-edge architecture of the *grands projets* in Paris. This legacy of history and culture – **le patrimoine** – is so widely dispersed across the land that even the briefest of stays will leave you with a powerful sense of France's past.

The importance of these traditions is felt deeply by the French state, which fights to preserve and develop its national **culture** perhaps harder than any other country in the world, and by private companies, which also strive to maintain French traditions in arenas as diverse as haute couture, pottery and, of course, food. The fruits of these efforts are evident in the subsidized **arts**, notably the film industry, and in the lavishly endowed and innovative **museums and galleries**. From colonial history to fishing techniques, aeroplane design to textiles, and migrant shepherds to manicure, an array of impressive collections can be found across the nation. Inevitably, however, first place must go to the fabulous displays of fine art in Paris, a city which has nurtured more than its fair share of the finest creative artists of the last century and a half, both French – Monet and Matisse

for example – and foreign, such as Picasso and Van Gogh.

There are all kinds of pegs on which to hang a holiday in France: a city, a region, a river, a mountain range, gastronomy, cathedrals, châteaux. All that open space means there's endless scope for outdoor activities, from walking, canoeing and cycling to skiing and sailing, but if you need more urban stimuli – clubs, shops, fashion, movies, music – then the great cities provide them in abundance.

Read more:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/france/#ixzz3EvpAyXTh>

# Russia

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The world's largest country offers it all, from historic cities and idyllic countryside to artistic riches, epic train rides and vodka-fuelled nightlife.

## Arty & Adventurous

Whether you're a culture vulture in search of inspiration from great artists and writers or an adventure addict looking for new horizons to conquer, Russia amply delivers. Tread in the footsteps of literary greats, including Tolstoy and Pushkin, on their country estates. Arrange a ski holiday in Krasnaya Polyana, newly spruced up for the 2014 Sochi Winter Olympics, go trekking in the Altai, or even climb an active volcano in Kamchatka – the varied possibilities will make you head spin.

## Urban & Rural

If ancient walled fortresses, glittering palaces and swirly-spired churches are what you're after, focus on European Russia. Here Moscow and St Petersburg are the must-see destinations, twin repositories of eye-boggling national treasures, political energies and contemporary creativity. Within easy reach of these cities are charming historical towns and villages, such as Veliky Novgorod, Pskov and Suzdal, where the vistas dotted with onion domes and lined with gingerbread cottages measure up to the rural Russia of popular imagination.

## Eternal Russia

Russia's vast geographical distances and cultural differences mean you don't tick off its highlights in the way you might those of a smaller nation. Instead, view Russia as a collection of distinct territories, each one deserving separate attention.

Rather than transiting via Moscow, consider flying direct to a regional centre such as Irkutsk, Novosibirsk or Yekaterinburg and striking out from there. With a welcome

spread of Western-style hostels along the Trans-Siberian route and the ease of booking trains and flights online, it's never been easier to organise this kind of trip.

## Why I Love Russia *By Simon Richmond, Author*

A traveller's relationship with Russia is never an easy one, but over two decades of exploring this multifaceted country, I've yet to tire of it or be disappointed. It's a thrill to discover the latest on the dynamic and liberal art scene in the major cities and I particularly relish the serene countryside, with Lake Baikal a favourite location. Above all, it has been encounters and passionate conversations with warmly welcoming, highly educated and hospitable Russians that have made the most lasting impression on me.

## A Riddle Worth Solving

We won't lie: tolerating bureaucracy, corruption and occasional discomfort, particularly away from the booming urban centres, remains an integral part of the Russian travel experience. However, a small degree of perseverance will be amply rewarded and one of the great joys of travel in Russia is being swept away by the boundless hospitality of the people.

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn put it best when he talked about Russia's 'ancient, deeply rooted autonomous culture...full of riddles and surprises to Western thinking'. You, too, will be beguiled by the beauty of its arts and the quixotic nature of its people. Read more:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/russia#ixzz3EvqJdOR2>

# St Petersburg

*Once a desolate swamp, [Russia's](#) imperial capital is today a dazzling metropolis whose sheer grandeur never fails to amaze.*

## Why I Love St Petersburg

*By Tom Masters, Author*

There is something about St Petersburg that gets under your skin. Despite preferring Moscow when I first came to Russia almost two decades ago, St Petersburg lingered; its colours and incredible light stayed with me, its history haunted me. When I came to live in Russia in 2000, I didn't hesitate in choosing St Petersburg. Today what excites me about the city is the growing underground art and music scene, the hedonistic atmosphere and the sense that great things are once again happening here. [The city](#) has emerged from [Moscow's](#) shadow and will, I hope, show you a very different side to modern Russia.

### City of the Tsars

Built from nothing by westward-looking Peter the Great, St Petersburg was from its inception to be a display of imperial Russia's growing status in the world. Fine-tuned by Peter's successors, who employed a host of European architects to add fabulous palaces and cathedrals to the city's layout, St Petersburg grew to be the Romanovs' showcase capital and Russia's first great, modern city, a status it has retained despite the capital moving back to Moscow following the revolution. Despite all that history has thrown at it, St Petersburg still feels every bit the imperial capital, a city largely frozen in time.

### Artistic Powerhouse

St Petersburg is an almost unrivalled treasure trove of art and culture. You can spend days in

the Hermitage, seeing everything from Egyptian mummies to Picassos, while the Russian Museum, spread over four sumptuous palaces, is perhaps the best collection of Russian art in the world. Add to this world-class ballet and opera at the [Mariinsky Theatre](#), classical concerts at the [Shostakovich Philharmonia](#) and a slew of big-name music festivals over the summer months, and you won't be stuck for cultural nourishment. If contemporary art is more your thing, there's also the fantastic Erarta Museum, showcasing the best in modern Russian art, and a small but buzzing gallery scene.

### Venice of the North

Whether you're cruising the elegant canals, crossing one of the 342 bridges in the city, or just watching them being raised over the mighty Neva River at night to allow ships to pass through, you're never far from water in St Petersburg, which has earned the city unsurprising comparisons to Venice. The similarities don't stop there, though: any wander in the historic centre will reveal canals lined by Italianate mansions and broken up by striking plazas adorned with baroque and neoclassical palaces.

### White Nights

The city's White Nights are legendary: those long summer evenings when the northern sun barely dips below the horizon. Revelry begins in May, when spring finally comes to the city and parks are filled with flowering trees, and peaks in mid-June, when the sky doesn't get dark, festivals pack out concert halls and the entire city seems to be partying over the brief but glorious summer. But don't worry – even when the skies are grey and the ground covered in snow, St Petersburg's rich culture still dazzles and delights. Read more: <http://www.lonelyplanet.com/russia/st-petersburg#ixzz3EvrFjINL>

## St Petersburg

**St Petersburg** (Санкт-Петербург), Petrograd, Leningrad and St Petersburg again – the city’s succession of names mirrors Russia’s turbulent history. Founded in 1703 by **Peter the Great** as a “window in the West”, three hundred years later St Petersburg, a self-assured and future-focused city, still retains more of a Western European feel than Moscow. A sophisticated capital of the tsarist Empire, the cradle of the Communist Revolution of 1917, and a symbol of Russian stoicism due to the city’s heroic endurance of a three-year Nazi siege during World War II, present-day St Petersburg has eased into modernity without sacrificing any of its old-world magnificence and charm, its shopping malls and nightclubs sitting alongside its opulent palaces. The city is easy to navigate and the pace of life is relaxed. The best **time to visit** is during the midsummer White Nights (mid-June to mid-July), when darkness never falls. From May to October all bridges across the Neva are raised from 1am to 5am – a beautiful sight, best seen from a boat.

St Petersburg’s centre lies on the south bank of the River Neva, with the curving River Fontanka marking its southern boundary. The area within the Fontanka is riven by a series of avenues fanning out from the golden spire of the Admiralty, on the Neva’s south bank. Many of the city’s top sights are located on and around **Nevsky Prospekt**, the backbone and heart of the city for the last three centuries, stretching from the Alexander Nevsky Monastery to Palace Square. Across the Neva is **Vasilevskiy Island**, with the Strelka at its eastern tip, and the Petrograd Side, home to the Peter and Paul Fortress. Beyond the River Fontanka lies **Smolnii**, where the Bolsheviks fomented revolution in 1917.

Read more:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/russia/st-petersburg/#ixzz3Evqv5Lm7>

## Russia

Soviet style, oligarch excess, ballet, banya and vodka

European Russia stretches from the borders of Belarus and Ukraine to the Ural mountains, over 1000km east of Moscow; even without the rest of the vast Russian Federation, it constitutes by far the largest country in Europe. Formerly a powerful tsarist empire and a Communist superpower, Russia continues to be a source of fascination for travellers. While access is still made relatively difficult by lingering Soviet-style bureaucracy – visas are obligatory and accommodation usually has to be booked in advance – independent travel is increasing every year, and visitors are doubly rewarded by the cultural riches of the country and the warmth of the Russian people.

Read more:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/russia/#ixzz3Evs6bFNn>

# Spain

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Passionate, sophisticated and devoted to living the good life, Spain is at once a stereotype come to life and a country more diverse than you ever imagined.

## **An Epic Land**

Spain's diverse landscapes stir the soul. The Pyrenees and the Picos de Europa are as beautiful as any mountain range on the continent, while the snowcapped Sierra Nevada rises up improbably from the sun-baked plains of Andalucia; these are hiking destinations of the highest order. The wildly beautiful cliffs of Spain's Atlantic northwest are offset by the charming coves of the Mediterranean. And everywhere you go, villages of timeless beauty perch on hilltops, huddle in valleys and cling to coastal outcrops as tiny but resilient outposts of Old Spain.

## **Art Imitates Life**

Poignantly windswept Roman ruins, cathedrals of rare power and incomparable jewels of Islamic architecture speak of a country where the great civilisations of history have always risen, fallen and left behind their indelible mark. More recently, what other country could produce such rebellious and relentlessly creative spirits as Salvador Dalí, Pablo Picasso and Antoni Gaudí and place them front and centre in public life? Here, grand monuments to the past coexist alongside architectural creations of such daring that it becomes clear that Spain's future will be every bit as original as its past.

## **Fiestas & Flamenco**

For all such talk, this is a country that lives very much in the present and there's a reason why 'fiesta' is one of the best-known words in the Spanish language. It's because life is itself a fiesta here and everyone seems to be invited. Perhaps you'll sense it along a crowded post-midnight street when all the

world has come out to play. Or maybe that moment will come when a flamenco performer touches something deep in your soul. Whenever it happens, you'll find yourself nodding in recognition: this is Spain.

## **Why I Love Spain** *By Anthony Ham, Author*

More than a decade after I fell in love with Spain and decided to call it home, the life that courses relentlessly through the streets here still produces in me a feeling that this is a place where anything can happen. Here, the passions of Europe's most passionate country are the fabric of daily life, a country with music in its soul and an unshakeable spring in its step. And over time Spain's passions – for fine food, for wild landscapes, for a life lived to the full – have become very much my own.

## **A Culinary Feast**

Food and wine are national obsessions in Spain, and with good reason. The touchstones of Spanish cooking are deceptively simple: incalculable variety, traditional recipes handed down through the generations, and an innate willingness to experiment and see what comes out of the kitchen-laboratory. You may experience the best meal ever over tapas in an earthy bar where everyone's shouting, or over a meal prepared by a celebrity chef in the refined surrounds of a Michelin-starred restaurant. Either way, the breadth of gastronomic experience that awaits you is breathtaking.

Read more:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/spain#ixzz3EvqQdC>

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# Spain

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Fiestas and flamenco, Gaudí and the Guggenheim

If you're visiting Spain for the first time, be warned: this is a country that fast becomes an addiction. You might intend to come just for a beach holiday, a walking tour or a city break, but before you know it you'll find yourself hooked by something quite different – the wild celebration of some local fiesta, perhaps, or the otherworldly architecture of Barcelona. Even in the best-known places to visit – from the capital, Madrid, to the *costas*, from the high Pyrenees to the Moorish cities of the south – there are genuinely surprising attractions at every turn, whether it's hip restaurants in the Basque country, the wild landscapes of the central plains, or cutting-edge galleries in the industrial north. Soon, you'll notice that there is not just one Spain but many – and indeed, Spaniards themselves often speak of *Las Españas* (the Spains).

Partly, this is down to an almost obsessive regionalism, stemming from the creation in the late 1970s of seventeen *comunidades autónomas* – autonomous regions – with their own governments, budgets and cultural ministries, even police forces. You might think you are on holiday in Spain – your hosts may be adamant that you're actually visiting Catalunya, and will point to a whole range of differences in language, culture and artistic traditions, not to mention social attitudes and politics. Indeed, the old days of a unified nation, governed with a firm hand from Madrid, seem to have gone forever, as the separate kingdoms that made up the original Spanish state reassert themselves in an essentially federal structure.

Does any of this matter for visitors? As a rule – not really, since few tourists have the time or

inclination to immerse themselves in contemporary Spanish political discourse. Far more important is to look beyond the clichés of paella, matadors, sangría and siesta if you're to get the best out of a visit to this amazingly diverse country.

Even in the most over-touristed resorts of the Costa del Sol, you'll be able to find an authentic bar or restaurant where the locals eat, and a village not far away where an age-old bullfighting tradition owes nothing to tourism. The large cities of the north, from Barcelona to Bilbao, have reinvented themselves as essential cultural destinations (and they don't all close down for hours for a kip every afternoon). And when the world now looks to Spain for culinary inspiration – the country has some of the most acclaimed chefs and innovative restaurants in the world – it's clear that things have changed. Spain, despite the current economic uncertainty, sees itself very differently from a generation ago. So should you – prepare to be surprised. Read more:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/spain/#ixzz3EvrxpXue>

# San Sebastián

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It's said that nothing is impossible. This is wrong. It's impossible to lay eyes on [San Sebastián](#) (Basque: [Donostia](#)) and not fall madly in love. This stunning city is cool, svelte and flirtatious by night, charming and well-mannered by day. It's a city that loves to indulge, and with Michelin stars apparently falling from the heavens onto its restaurants and a *pintxo* (tapas) culture almost unmatched anywhere else in Spain, San Sebastián frequently tops lists of the world's best places to eat. But just as good as the food is the summer fun in the sun. For its setting, form and attitude, [Playa de la Concha](#) is the equal of any city beach in Europe. Then there's Playa de Gros (also known as [Playa de la Zurriola](#)), with its surfers and sultry beach-goers. As the sun falls on another sweltering summer's day, you'll sit back with a drink and an artistic *pintxo* and realise that, yes, you too are in love with San Sebastián.

San Sebastián has four main centres of action. The lively Parte Vieja (old town) lies across the neck of [Monte Urgull](#), the bay's eastern headland, and is where the most popular *pintxo* bars and many of the cheap lodgings are to be found. South of the Parte Vieja is the commercial and shopping district, the Centro Romántico, its handsome grid of late-19th-century buildings extending from behind Playa de la Concha to the banks of Río Urumea. On the east side of the river is the district of Gros, a pleasant enclave that, with its relaxed ambience and the surfing beach of Playa de Gros, makes a cheerful alternative to the honeypots on the west side of the river. Right at the opposite, western end, of the city is [Playa de Ondarreta](#) (essentially a continuation of Playa de la Concha), a very upmarket district known as a millionaires' belt on account of its lavish holiday homes. Read more:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/spain/aragon-basque-country-and-navarra/san-sebastian#ixzz3EvqhNG7j>

## San Sebastian

Making the most of its glorious location, curving languidly around a magnificent semicircular bay that's lined with golden sand, **SAN SEBASTIÁN** ranks among the great resort cities of Europe. Although it's the capital of its region, Gipuzkoa, and has a reputation as a hotbed of Basque nationalism, it has never been a major port, or much of an industrial centre. Instead its primary identity, ever since the Spanish royal family first decamped here for the summer in 1845, has been as a summer playground. In July and August especially, it tends to be packed out, and its hotels are among the most expensive in Spain.

While the superb sheltered **beach** on its very doorstep is the biggest attraction of all, San Sebastián also boasts a charming old-town core, the **Casco Viejo**, squeezed up against the foot of verdant Monte Urgull. The new town to the south, known as **Centro** and the commercial hub of the city, holds a fine crop of century-old *belle époque* edifices, though they're interspersed between rather too many dreary newer buildings for this to be an area where you're likely to spend much time.

The official name of the city, **Donostia-San Sebastián**, is a tautology, in that Donostia is a Basque name for Saint Sebastian. Some say Sebastian was martyred in the Roman port of Ostia, and is thus the Don (saint) of Ostia; others that Ostia (or Osti) is simply an abbreviation of Sebastian.

Read more:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/spain/euskal-herria-the-pais-vasco-and-navarra/san-sebastian/#ixzz3EvrYi6pU>

# Rome

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History, human genius and the hot midday sun have conspired to make [Rome](#) one of the world's most seductive and thrilling cities.

## Roman Feasting

A trip to Rome is as much about lapping up the lifestyle as it is gorging on art and historic sights. And there's no better way of getting into the local spirit of things than by eating and drinking well. Food and wine are central to Roman social life and the hundreds of pizzerias, trattorias, restaurants and *gelaterie* that crowd the city centre do as much business catering to locals as to tourists and out-of-towners. Do as the Romans do, says the proverb, and there's nothing more Roman than enjoying a tasty wood-fired pizza in a packed pizzeria or dining al fresco on a glorious city-centre piazza.

## Rome Capital

But there's more to Rome than history, fine art and great food. Rome is [Italy](#)'s capital and largest city, and while history reverberates all around, modern life is lived to the full. Rome is Italy's political and religious heartbeat and the twin presence of government and Church dominates the city. Many city-centre *palazzi* house government offices while over in the Vatican the dome of St Peter's Basilica serves to remind everyone of the pope's presence. Political intrigue is thick in the air and as tourists tuck into their pasta politicians hunker down to hatch plots over spaghetti and wine.

## Historical Legacies

For much of its history Rome has been at the centre of world events, first, as *caput mundi* (capital of the world), the fearsome hub of the Roman Empire, then for centuries as the seat of papal power. It was a city that counted and this is writ large on its historic streets - martial ruins recall ancient glories, stately *palazzi*

evoke Renaissance intrigue, towering basilicas testify to artistic genius and papal ambition. Elsewhere, underground temples, buried houses and *maddonelle* (roadside shrines) tell of past lives and local beliefs.

## Artistic Grandeur

With an artistic heritage dating back to Etruscan times, Rome is one of the world's great art cities. Throughout history, it has played a starring role in the major upheavals of Western art and the results are there for all to see – amazing classical statues, stunning Renaissance frescoes, breathtaking baroque churches. Walk around the centre and even without trying you'll come across masterpieces by the greats of the artistic pantheon – sculptures by Michelangelo, paintings by Caravaggio, frescoes by Raphael, fountains by Bernini. In Rome, art is not locked away from view, it's quite literally all around you.

## Rome

Rome is the most fascinating city in Italy, which makes it arguably the most fascinating city in the world. An ancient place packed with the relics of over two thousand years of inhabitation, you could spend a month here and still only scratch the surface. Yet it's so much more than an open-air museum: its culture, its food, its people make up a modern, vibrant city that would be worthy of a visit irrespective of its past. As a historic centre, it is special enough; as a contemporary European capital, it is utterly unique.

The former heart of the mighty Roman Empire, and still the home of the papacy, the city is made up of layers of history. There are Rome's classical features, most visibly the [Colosseum](#), and the [Forum](#) and [Palatine Hill](#); but beyond these there's an almost uninterrupted sequence of monuments – from early Christian basilicas and Romanesque churches to Renaissance palaces and the fountains and churches of the Baroque period, which perhaps more than any other era has determined the look of the city today. There is the modern epoch, too, from the ponderous Neoclassical architecture of the post-Unification period to prestige projects like Zaha Hadid's [MAXXI](#) exhibition space. And these various eras crowd in on one another to an almost overwhelming degree, with medieval churches atop ancient basilicas above Roman palaces; houses and apartment blocks that incorporate fragments of eroded Roman columns, carvings and inscriptions; roads and piazzas which follow the lines of ancient amphitheatres and stadiums.

You won't enjoy Rome if you spend your time trying to tick off things to do. However, there are some places that it would be a pity to leave the city without seeing. The [Vatican](#) is

perhaps the most obvious one, most notably [St Peter's](#) and the amazing stock of loot in the [Vatican Museums](#); and the star attractions of the ancient city are worth a day or two in their own right. There are also the churches, fountains and works of art from the period that can be said to most define Rome, the Baroque, and in particular the works of Borromini and Bernini, whose efforts compete for space and attention throughout the city. Bernini was responsible for the Fountain of the Four Rivers in the city's most famous square, [Piazza Navona](#), among other things; but arguably his best sculptural work is in the [Galleria Borghese](#), or in various churches, like his statue of St Theresa in Santa Maria della Vittoria. Borromini, his great rival at the time, built the churches of San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane and Sant'Ivo, both buildings intricately squeezed into small sites – Borromini's trademark. Other great palaces are themselves treasure-troves of great art, like the [Doria Pamphilj](#) and [Palazzo Barberini](#); and there are some unmissable museums, like the galleries of the [Capitoline](#), and the main collections of the Museo Nazionale Romano in the Palazzo Altemps and Palazzo Massimo, all of which hold staggering collections of the cream of the city's ancient art and sculpture. And finally there's the city itself: stroll through the *centro storico* in the early morning, through Trastevere at sunset, or gaze down at the roofs and domes from the Janiculum Hill on a clear day, and you'll quickly realize that there's no place in Italy like it.

The city centre is divided neatly into distinct blocks. The warren of streets that makes up the [centro storico](#) occupies the hook of land on the left bank of the River Tiber, bordered to the east by Via del Corso and to the north and south by water. From here Rome's central core spreads south and east: down towards Campo de' Fiori; across Via del Corso to the major shopping streets and alleys around the [Spanish Steps](#); to the major sites of

the [ancient city](#) to the south; and to the expanse of the [Villa Borghese](#) park to the north. The left bank of the river is a little more distanced from the main hum of the city centre, home to the Vatican and St Peter's, and, to the south of these, [Trastevere](#) – even in ancient times a distinct entity from the city proper, although nowadays as much of a focus for tourists as anywhere, especially at night.

Beyond Rome, the region of [Lazio](#) inevitably pales in comparison, but there is plenty of things to do there, not least the landscape, which varies from the green hills and lakes of the northern reaches to the drier, more mountainous south. It's a relatively poor region, its lack of identity the butt of a number of Italian jokes, but it's the closest you'll get to the feel of the Italian South without catching the train to Naples. Much of the area can be easily seen on a day-trip from the capital, primarily the ancient sites of [Ostia Antica](#) and the various attractions of [Tivoli](#). Further afield, in northern Lazio, the Etruscan sites of [Tarquinia](#) and [Cerveteri](#) provide the most obvious tourist focus, as does the pleasant provincial town of [Viterbo](#) and the gentle beauty of lakes [Bracciano](#), [Vico](#) and [Bolsena](#). The south arguably holds Lazio's most appealing enclaves, not least unpretentious resorts like [Terracina](#) and [Sperlonga](#), and the island of [Ponza](#) – one of the most alluring spots on the entire western seaboard.

Read more:

<http://www.roughguides.com/destinations/europe/italy/rome-lazio/#ixzz3Evr8aDn8>

## Why I Love Rome

By Duncan Garwood, Author

Even after more than a decade of living in Rome, the city continues to amaze me. I still get a buzz every time I see the Colosseum and I still find it thrilling to visit places I read about as a school kid. But as much as the history, what I love is the way the city embraces the

present, the way designer bars occupy 15th-century *palazzi* and neighbourhood markets take over beautiful historic piazzas. I also enjoy a good meal in a Roman trattoria, especially if accompanied by a bit of political banter and a bottle of local wine.

Read more:

<http://www.lonelyplanet.com/italy/rome#ixzz3Evr0shNh>