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The best guide to Rome, packed with essentials Close-up of the Sistine Chapel, the Colosseum, the Forum, plus museum treasures, the gardens, the neighborhoods The top spots to shop -- Piazza di Spagna to Via Nazionale Side trips to nearby towns and historic villas Where to stay and eat, no matter what your budget Renaissance palazzi, luxury hotels, converted mansions, homey pensions -- in every neighborhood Elegant shrines of haute cuisine, family restaurants, enoteche, pizzerias, cafés, gelaterias, and pasticcerias Fresh, thorough, practical -- off and on the beaten path Costs, hours, descriptions, and tips by the thousands All reviews based on visits by savvy writer-residents 15 pages of maps -- and dozens of great features Important contacts, smart travel tips Fodor's Choice What's Where Pleasures Pastimes Festivals Complete index Excerpt. © Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved. This excerpt, from the Pleasures and Pastimes section, gives you a taste of what Rome has to offer and the sights and scenes that make it a great place to visit. Dining Rome is a city distinguished more by its good attitude toward eating out than by a multitude of outstanding restaurants. Don't look for star chefs here, or the latest trends -- with a few notable exceptions, the city's food scene is a bit like its historic sites, well-worn but still standing. Nonetheless, Romans have been known since ancient times for great feasts and banquets, and though the days of the triclinium and the saturnalia are long past, dining out is still all the nightlife most Romans need. In fact, a lingering meal al fresco is one of Rome's great pleasures. There was a time when you could predict the clientele and prices of a Roman eating establishment by whether it was called a ristorante (restaurant), a trattoria, or an osteria (tavern). These names have since become interchangeable. A rustic-looking spot that calls itself an osteria may turn out to be chic and anything but cheap. Generally speaking, however, a trattoria is a family-run place, simpler in decor, cuisine, and service -- and slightly less expensive -- than a ristorante. At no establishment should you feel compelled to eat a "full" meal (antipasto, first course, second course, side dish, and dessert), but ordering just a green salad will likely be frowned upon (Italians can't really seem to understand why someone would go out to a restaurant and then not eat). Lunch is served from noon to 3, dinner from 8 until about 10:30 or 11, but some restaurants stay open later, especially in summer, when patrons linger at sidewalk tables to enjoy the ponentino (evening breeze). The Passeggiata (Strolling) A favorite pastime of Romans (and most Italians) is the passeggiata, literally, the promenade. In the late afternoon, especially on weekends, couples, family groups, and packs of teenagers stroll in the main streets and piazzas. The passeggiata usually includes some café-sitting and window-shopping as well. Your own version of the passeggiata, different from all that purposeful walking you have to do to see the sights, could take you on an aimless stroll into Rome's byways. As you amble down the narrow streets, take time to peek into courtyards and look up at open windows as dusk falls to see lights go on, illuminating carved or frescoed ceilings on upper floors. The perfect accompaniment to a passeggiata is a gelato, or ice cream, either cone or cup, to be enjoyed as you ramble through Rome. Shopping The city's most famous shopping district is conveniently compact, fanning out at the foot of the Spanish Steps in a galaxy of boutiques offering gorgeous wares with glamorous labels. Here you can ricochet from Gucci to Prada to Valentino and Versace with less effort than it takes to pull out your platinum credit card. Even if your budget is designed for lower altitudes, you can find great clothes and accessories at prices you can afford. But buying is not necessarily the point. The greatest pleasure is in browsing, admiring window displays that are works of art, imagining you or yours in a little red dress by Valentino or a lean Armani suit, and dreaming that all this could be yours -- if your name were Bill Gates. Sidewalk Cafés Café-sitting is the most popular leisure-time activity in Rome, practiced by all and involving nothing more strenuous than gesturing to catch the waiter's eye. Cafés are meant for relaxing, chatting with a companion, and/or eyeing the passing parade, possibly within view of one of the city's spectacular fountains or churches, in a square that would seem naked without a fringe of bright café umbrellas or awnings. For tourists and shoppers, part of this particular pleasure is resting tired feet. You will never be rushed, no matter how long you sit, and not even when café tables are crowded at aperitif time, just before lunch and, especially, supper. It's said that you can tell people by the café they sit at -- from the tony types at Teichner in Piazza San Lorenzo in Lucina to the intellectuals and celebrities at the Antico Caffè della Pace, to all of the above -- plus the rest of the world -- at Tre Scalini in Piazza Navona.