SPECIALIST
JOURNEYS



Colosseum

Christmas in Rome
A festive period to remember in the Eternal City

Christmas is a wonderful time to visit Rome as the streets are brightly lit and decorated, the churches display their ancient cribs and the city celebrates. An exhilarating and intimate destination, where the glories of its ancient past mingle with museums, art-filled churches and Renaissance piazzas, this is the perfect introduction to the 'Eternal City' led by Oliver Gilkes, who illuminates the triumphs, tragedies and political intrigue that characterised the Roman Empire. We stay at the Hotel Santa Chiara in the very heart of the ancient city, situated directly behind the Pantheon, the perfect base for exploring Rome. It has been privately owned by the Corteggiani family since 1838 and consequently retains a feeling of personal warmth and friendliness.

Key highlights

- Explore the atmospheric, underground service tunnels of the mighty Colosseum
- Enjoy the glorious collections and masterpieces on view at the Capitoline Museums
- Discover some extraordinary 'hidden' gems and world-famous classical sites

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Day One: London - Rome
Arrive into Rome and meet your expert Guide Lecturer and fellow travellers at your hotel.

Meals: Dinner

Day Two: Rome
We start our morning at the **Capitoline Museums**, which occupy two Michelangelo-designed palaces atop the Campidoglio - the Palazzo dei Conservatori and Palazzo Nuovo, forming the oldest public museum in the world. A joy to explore, these museums are home to one of the finest and oldest collections of ancient sculpture in Rome. Masterpieces include the She-Wolf suckling the twins Romulus and Remus, the graceful Capitoline Venus, the bronze equestrian statue of Marcus Aurelius and the colossal statue of the river-god Marforio reclining lazily in a fountain in the courtyard of the Palazzo Nuovo.

After lunch, we visit one of Rome's hidden gems, situated beneath the **Palazzo Valentini**. Here we find the well-preserved remains of a former Roman private bathhouse and two residences of powerful families from the imperial era.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day Three: Rome
Our day begins with a visit to the **Colosseum**, the iconic Flavian Amphitheatre — the largest of its type ever constructed. Here, we enjoy the underground service tunnels, with access to the atmospheric corridors in which many lives were lived and broken. We see its ingenious infrastructure comprising animal cages, trapdoors and elevators, used to enable the deployment of props, animals and gladiators into the arena. Afterwards, we explore another of Rome's surprises, the **Church of San Clemente**.

After lunch, we take an afternoon walk through the heart of ancient Rome, passing through the **Forum**, the site of profound historical events such as the Gracchi riots and Caesar's funeral. Finally, we walk along the later **Imperial Fora**, an elaborate series of ruined public squares, finishing at Trajan's Column.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day Four: Rome
We begin the day with a visit to the **Borghese Gallery**, a 17th-century villa, which houses a spectacular art collection of ancient and Renaissance masterpieces, belonging to one of Rome's most illustrious families. There are some exquisite pieces here, including Bernini's Apollo and Daphne with its extraordinary portrayal of movement as Daphne transforms into the laurel and Caravaggio's painting of David in the aftermath of Goliath's defeat, gazing on the head of Goliath, a haunting depiction of the fragility of power. We continue to the Non-Catholic cemetery of Rome, tucked inside the Aurelian walls which is the final resting place of Shelley and Keats and adjacent to the iconic **Pyramid of Gaius Cestius**. We finish the day with a visit to the wonderful **Montemartini Museum**, once a power station and now part of the Capitoline Museums, containing a treasure trove of mosaics and sculptures juxtaposed against the industrial backdrop of the old power station, all beautifully lit and displayed.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day Five: Rome
On Christmas Day, we stroll through the **Field of Mars**, originally an open area lying just outside Rome's earliest defences. It was used first as a training area and for meetings of public assemblies, then gradually monumentalised to provide a new zone of civic buildings to serve Rome's growing population. The modern street system is a medieval labyrinth and we walk through the winding roads and alleys to the Vatican to hear the **Pope's Christmas message**. It is a lovely city to find yourself on Christmas morning, the streets busy with cheerful citizens and churches displaying their Nativity scenes.

Meals: Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner

Day Six: Rome
This morning, we leave Rome and travel to **Ostia Antica**, the ancient harbour city of Rome, close to the mouth of the Tiber. Originally Rome's first colony, it became a thriving port, handling the transhipment of goods and foodstuffs from sea-going vessels to river barges in new harbours provided by Claudius and Trajan. Ostia still has the atmosphere of a seaport, with its docks, warehouses, apartment blocks, theatre and temples to a range of foreign and Roman deities. It is well-preserved, thanks to rising water levels in the late Roman period and the lack of subsequent buildings, and it has been extensively excavated. From Ostia, we continue to the airport for our late afternoon flight home or continue at your leisure.

Meals: Breakfast


Petersdom

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Activity level - **Moderate** ●●○

Your Expert Guide Lecturer

Oliver Gilkes



Oliver is an archaeologist of eclectic experience. Currently he works as a freelance consulting archaeologist, and provides advice for Andante Travels on designing as well as leading a number of tour groups. Oliver began as a commercial archaeologist and museum curator in the UK. Preferring warmer weather, he worked for over 10 years as a field archaeologist in Italy for the British School at Rome at classical and medieval sites. These included a rescue excavation in the grounds of the British Embassy at Porta Pia in Rome, and the great Carolingian abbey of San Vincenzo al Volturno in the central Italian mountains — two very contrasting sites. Further afield, he drove through North Africa to participate in excavations in Cyrenaica, mainly because it revisited a journey his mother had made with the eighth army in 1943, but also because of the wonderful classical sites to be seen. He then followed a childhood destiny, specifically the callsign of Radio Tirana, and moved across the Adriatic to Albania, where he directed excavations and trained students at the World Heritage Sites of Butrint and the evocative medieval city of Gjirokastra. Oliver is still involved in a number of projects in Albania, notably the survey and excavation of an intriguing Hellenistic sanctuary, and is one of only a handful of experts on Albanian archaeology in the United Kingdom. Oliver's publications include: Gilkes, O. et al. 2013. Gjirokastra: the essential guide. Norwich: Gjirokastra Conservation and Development Organization. Gilkes, O. 2012. Albania: an archaeological guide. London: I.B. Tauris. And numerous papers and articles in journals and magazines.

Your tour includes

- Expert Guide Lecturer & professional Tour Manager
- Entries to all sites as per the itinerary
- Field notes
- All taxes & gratuities
- Return flights from London
- Private group transfers to/from the airport & hotel
- Local travel aboard a private air-conditioned coach
- 5 nights at the Hotel Albergo Santa Chiara, Rome
- 5 breakfasts, 4 lunches & 5 dinners
- Water with all meals, wine & tea or coffee with dinner



Forum Romanum