



No place like Rome

There's the architecture, of course, and the culture, but do you know about the great shops, bars and restaurants? By Alessandra Signorelli. Main photographs by Stefano Ciafardoni

There are cities that are like a double espresso: they'll make you frantic, but soon you'll be exhausted. Others are like a rum-based cocktail: they'll give you a kick, but it won't last. Rome is pure chocolate mousse; it'll make you happy, and you'll want more.

There is something in the city that screams for overindulgence: the ever-shining sun, the delicious food, the elegant clothes, the ever-flirting residents. The tradition goes back a long way: not for nothing did Roman emperors eat lying down. No wonder Hollywood star **George Clooney** (when in town to promote *Ocean's Eleven*) said he wanted to move here.

And if authentic Roman atmosphere is still to be found in noisy trattorias where you'll be ignored by the waiters, a generation of New Yorkish venues has sprung up, where a new buzz can be felt, but in the Roman way. In other words, still expect to be served half an hour after you've ordered. But that's part of the charm, isn't it? Because Rome, as director **Bernardo Bertolucci** (*The Sheltering Sky*, *Little Buddha*) once put it, "is a pachyderm that doesn't even pretend to be efficient". But what a gorgeous pachyderm it is.

WHERE TO STAY
Since its birth two years ago, **Rocco Forte's** baby, the **Hotel de Russie** (via del Babuino 9; 0039 06 328 881; doubles from 520 euros/about £320), has become a meeting point for Roman society,

as well as a base for Hollywood royalty (**Tom Cruise** and **Penélope Cruz**, **Meg Ryan** and **Renée Zellweger**) and real royalty in transit (**Queen Rania of Jordan**). During fashion week, models and their entourage get their beauty sleep at the Art Deco **Hotel Locarno** (via della Penna 22; 0039 06 361 0841; doubles 190 euros/about £117), where Roman playboys are always on the prowl. When reserving at the **Hotel Hassler** (piazza Trinità dei Monti 6; 0039 06 6993 4613; doubles from 513 euros/about £315), a Roman institution perched on top of the Spanish Steps, aficionados including **Madonna** and **Russell Crowe** ask for their favourite suites (Madonna the Penthouse suite, Crowe the San Pietro). If tired of too much grandeur, check into the intimate **Casa Howard** (via Capo le Case 18; 0039 06 6992 4555; doubles from 120 euros/about £75), where you'll feel like you're staying with a very stylish friend. The five rooms are individually decorated, and you'll be pampered by housekeeper Christy (once a customer had her purse stolen, and she lent her money for the rest of her stay).

WHERE TO EAT
Dress cool (no tie) and make it through the fierce screening at the door (**U2's Bono**, unrecognised, was recently turned down) at **Bloom** (via del Teatro Pace 30; 0039 06 6880 2029). The restaurant-sushi bar (60 euros/about £37 per person for a three-course meal) attracts a sophisticated crowd, including Italian bombshell ▶



Clockwise from opposite page, cocktail hour at La Vineria; people-watch in the Campo Fiori; the Roman skyline; A-list fans of the city George Clooney and Monica Bellucci; St Peter's at sunset; luxury at the Hotel Locarno; the terrace at the Hotel de Russie; one of only five rooms at Casa Howard; the famous Spanish Steps; and the Pantheon

