



\$172

**HOTEL LOCARNO**

An old-fashioned art deco charmer right off fashionable Via del Corso, the Locarno has elegant period details. Double rooms start at \$172; #505 (far left), a deluxe, costs \$266; the similar #504 next door is \$172.



\$215

**ALBERGO DEL SENATO**

Like the neighboring Pantheon, the Albergo is a Roman extravaganza. From the lavish lobby, with its gilt and brocade, to plush double beds like #603 (near left; \$215), the hotel delivers palatial ambience.



\$396

**HOTEL REGINA BAGLIONI**

A true Via Veneto grand hotel, the Regina, which recently finished an extensive renovation, swatches guests in luxury, from the restaurant (far left) to #605 (\$396) to lavish oils lining the marble-tiled reception area.

Want the sweet life in Rome? It's yours for fewer zeros than you think. BY LEIGH NEWMAN

**ROME BY THE NUMBERS**

Rome is one of those places you go when you don't have enough marble columns in your life—or marble statues or marble bathtubs with a built-in phone. This isn't a city for your little *hôtel du charme* with an in-room sink and *grandmère* antiques. It's the place that put the -issima in every "Bellissima!" sung out to every woman passing by on the street. You need a hotel like one of its wedding-cake,

fin-de-siècle monuments—decadent and mammoth and over-the-top. There are just 12 official five-star hotels in Rome, but that doesn't mean some four- and three-star properties won't offer you a slice of la dolce vita. And as devil-may-care as everybody may seem drinking their Camparis on the terrace, Romans love conformity. All "grand" hotels have a marble lobby with a

**ROME**

stately staircase, estate antiques, and bronze statues of glaring gods crowned with laurel. Only the quality of the antiques and the size of the staircases vary.

The first place you look for a grand hotel is the Via Veneto—that broad boulevard, home to the American Embassy, wealthy citizens, and, sadly now, a Hard Rock Cafe. You may know the hotels here. Crowded with tour groups (lobbies full of fanny-pack wearers clutching bottles of water) or revamped with industrial carpeting over the parquet floors, many now belie their reputations. Besides, the most important thing is that your hotel be near the center—the fountains, piazzas, and pulse that make even the alleys of this city feel exciting.

But then you need to keep in mind that other category of Roman excess, namely high-issima prices. No Roman hotel (except for a pension) comes particularly cheap. Many rooms start at \$250 a night and look like they belong in sad airport chains. Getting off the Via Veneto will bring down rates a bit. Traveling during the low season helps even more; most hotels offer as much as 30 percent off from January to March and in July and August. Our priciest pick shaves \$57 off a \$383 double in low season. And our middle choice drops from \$215 to \$190. So pack some Grand-Tour-style trunks. The world is your oyster—and your glass of champagne. At least for the night.

**\$172 AND UP**

You just don't expect the Hotel Locarno to charge \$172 a night. Not with a location right in the shadow of the splendid Piazza del Popolo. Not when its 70 rooms have decor so classic they practically belong in Roman mythology. The Locarno is split into two wings, one original, the other recently converted from a period building. Surprise: You'll want the new wing. It's been decorated traditionally, with all the features you expect from a grand establishment. (If you're a stickler

for authenticity, try #312 in the original wing, with its rose-patterned damask on the walls and its antique mahogany.) For a really regal experience—and more space than any other hotel will offer in this price range—spend \$94 more and get a deluxe double. Take #505 in the new wing. The bedside tables are topped with marble, the floors parquet, the furniture curvy '20s antiques, the walls flocked with printed fabric featuring goddesses perched on bulls' heads. The bathroom even has a giant claw-foot tub.

The letdown? Built in 1925, this art deco hotel's sleeker and more understated than Rome's grandest establishments. In the lobby and bar, you just don't get much of that gilt and marble trim. You do get an ancient two-man mahogany elevator and a smartly uniformed bellboy. Best of all, everything is original, from the wood check-in desk to the cocktail lounge downstairs. And a curvaceous marble fireplace sits at one end of it, topped—as if the Roman owners need to "grand" the place up—with a bronze clock and sconces from the late 19th century.

Service? Well, it can be spotty. The staff is very friendly, but I had the dubious experience of having my bellboy describe his hangover, which seemed both inappropriate and funny. He pretty much epitomized the staff. Breakfast, though, redeems any disappointments. Served up on the rooftop, where lemon trees stand guard, the setting instantly elevates espresso and rolls to a higher, more rarified level (double rooms from \$172 a night, year-round; Via della Penna 22; 011-39-06-36-10-841).

**\$215 AND UP**

Well, the 56-room Albergo del Senato has plenty of grand going for it. It's right beside the Pantheon, one of the city's most awe-inspiring sites (though the crowds to see it can be anxiety-inspiring in equal measure). Then the Albergo is the Albergo. Yes, it's more of a mini-palace than a palace. But everything's here.

I stayed in #204. It's the slightly

cramped size typical of double rooms everywhere. But the tables are topped with dark green marble, and ceilings are molded with plaster laurel leaves. The matching fabrics on walls and drapes are a cream silk that complements the blue-and-gold stripes on the beds. Furniture is reproduction Empire, all thin-columned legs and brass handles. And then there are the little things: the crystal sconces, the linen liners in the bathroom, the marble balcony that looks right on the Pantheon. A television, towel warmer, and mini-bar—all are here, too.

In fact, the Albergo measures up throughout. The building is turn-of-the-last-century (though not built originally as a hotel). In the lobby, brass urns sit on marble stands. And the floor is inlaid with marble—pink, beige, black, and white. There's gilt on the chairs, gilt on the cornices, and lots of sunlight. The hotel delivers on service as well. Sure, there are fewer folks to fawn over you than on the Via Veneto, and those here will fawn less, but they're extremely genuine. Even the penthouse terrace doesn't disappoint. Ironwork tables topped with—you guessed it—marble stand under olive trees. You can have breakfast here, or avoid the crowds below at sunset with cocktails, complete with a dome's-eye view of the shimmering Pantheon (double rooms from \$215 in high season, from \$190 in low season; Piazza della Rotonda 73; 011-39-06-678-43-43).

**\$383 AND UP**

The Regina Baglioni is a Via Veneto palace—literally. It was the residence of the Queen Mother in the early 1900s. The prices remain a bit lower than its neighbors because the recently renovated 130-room hotel is still considered a relative newcomer. And the Italian owners know authentic Roman style and haven't tried to turn it into a Four Seasons.

The entire building is knee-knocking grand. The marble doesn't just drip here; it flows like some kind of annex to the Trevi Foun-