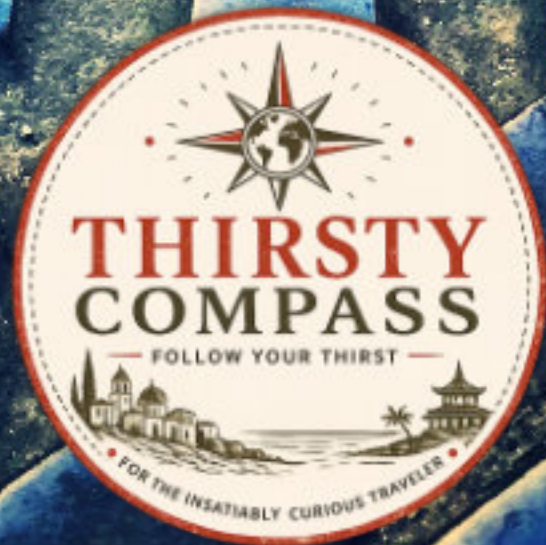




LA CITTÀ DI ROMA



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This whole guide contains my "Top Picks" but where many options are listed, a top-top pick is indicated with this icon; all suggestions are solid otherwise they wouldn't be here.

If you find otherwise, please let me know: hello@thirstycompass.co



Eating and Drinking Like You Actually Live Here: An Insider's Guide for People Who Take Food Seriously

Introduction: Why Rome Is Hard to Get Right

Rome is one of the most visited cities on earth, which means it's also one of the most written about. There is no shortage of Rome food guides. Most of them are erroneous or at least written by people who visited rather than people who know the place.

I lived here for four years. Through COVID, which added its own layer of complexity and produced its own particular stories. I've been back multiple times since for extended stays. I took real people to these places, watched them eat, listened to what they said. I have the kind of opinions you only develop after eating in the same neighborhoods enough times to know which pizza place has the attitude and which one lets you linger.

What follows are the places I actually go, the things I actually order, and the honest opinions I share with friends who ask, which over the years has been a lot of friends.

A few things this guide is not.

It is not comprehensive. Rome is enormous and I am one person. Some neighborhoods in this guide get more coverage than others. That is not for lack of visiting or having opinions ... it is because the zones I write about in depth are the ones I know best, return to most, and trust completely. They reflect what I genuinely love about this city and align with the things I care about: good food, good wine, real neighborhoods, places that have nothing to prove.

This guide does not cover the Vatican, the Sistine Chapel, the Pantheon, or the inside of the Colosseum. Not because they aren't worth seeing, but because there is no shortage of people telling you about them. Entire industries exist for that purpose.

What this guide tries to do instead is point you toward the things that don't have industries behind them: the neighborhood trattoria, the wine bar the expats found, the museum in the power plant, the cheese shop that vacuum-packs your order for the flight home. Occasionally a well-known landmark will appear in these pages, but only when it offers something specific that tends to get overlooked. Michelangelo's Moses at San Pietro in Vincoli sits quietly in Monti while the crowds form elsewhere. When that happens, I'll tell you why it's worth your time. Otherwise, for the big ticket items, you are in capable hands with the rest of the Internet.

It is personal, unsponsored, and specific. I will tell you when something is overrated. I will tell you when something is worth every euro.

Now, let's eat!

Understanding Roman Food First

The Four Pastas

Rome has four canonical pasta dishes. They are related to each other in a specific way, and understanding the progression makes you a better orderer everywhere you go.

Cacio e Pepe is the foundation: pasta, aged pecorino romano, black pepper, and pasta water emulsified into a sauce. No cream. No butter. Deceptively simple, endlessly variable in quality.

Gricia is Cacio e Pepe plus crispy guanciale (cured pork cheek, not bacon, not pancetta). Some argue this is the original Roman pasta, predating tomatoes in Italy.

Carbonara is Gricia plus an egg yolk worked into the cheese and pasta water. The egg should be barely cooked by the heat of the pasta: creamy, not scrambled. If it looks like scrambled eggs, it's been done wrong.

Amatriciana swaps the egg for tomato, making it the one red-sauce pasta in this family. It's excellent everywhere, except at one specific place where you should order something else entirely.

Roman Pizza: Two Completely Different Things

Pizza tonda is the thin, crispy, round pizza you eat sitting down at dinner. Nothing like American thin-crust. The first time you eat it, your expectations will be recalibrated permanently. This is dinner, and if you are Italian, you are probably enjoying some fried food as an appetizer: French fries, Olives ascolana (deep fried & stuffed), or fried fish.

Pizza al taglio is thick, rectangular, sold by weight. You point at what you want, they cut a piece, they weigh it, you pay. Eat it standing up or walking. This is a midday snack, not a dinner.


Roman pizza tonda and pizza al taglio are not competing styles. They serve completely different purposes. It isn't a comparison.

Vegetables Worth Knowing

Carciofi — Artichokes, and Rome does them two ways. Carciofi alla romana are braised with olive oil, garlic, and mint until tender all the way through. Carciofi alla giudia come from the Jewish Ghetto tradition: the whole artichoke is flattened and deep-fried until the outer leaves are crisp and the interior is creamy. They are not the same dish. Order both.



Where to Eat and Drink in Testaccio


 **Testaccio Market** The daily (Monday-Saturday) market at Piazza Testaccio is one of the best in Rome. Local crowd, genuine produce, (mostly) real prices. Go in the morning. The vendors have been there forever. While this is a locals market, over the last many years, it is now on the radar for foodie tours, so substantially more tourists are around than before. Some of my favorite stalls:


Mordi & Vai – Get the #1. A simple sandwich of long roasted beef that has the bottom of the bread soaked in the cooking juices and topped with a little stewed cicoria. It's so good!

Casa Manco – Pizza al taglio in both traditional and non-traditional flavors, all delicious, but what will surprise you is how light the crust is. Run by an English couple who have been embedded for a lifetime in Testaccio.

Vinarius – Grab a glass of wine or prosecco here for a couple of euros while you walk around the market. It's not the best wine but Vinarius is the institution of Testaccio Market for this type of activity. Other places will certainly serve you a glass of whatever you want as well.



 **Da Oio a Casa Mia** The decor is clean & simple, the waiters are wonderful. The owner has a bit of an edge sometimes, but that's part of the charm. Locals go here. Recently renovated but it hasn't lost its soul. Order the chicken cacciatore; it is life changing!

 **Osteria degli Amici** You'll love this place. The food is wonderful, the people are wonderful. They renovated a couple of years ago and went from a bit run down to a genuinely lovely spot for higher-end Roman food. Still completely authentic, just cleaner and more refined.