

Four days to take Rome

Start at the main event is the call from the bleachers or is that the bleeders? Seems only yesterday, as a testosterone driven boy of the seventies, that Rome and rip-off s were couched in the same linguafranca.

The natives were hell bent on "cabbage", which was a levy attached to every taxi overcharge, and blonde headed girlfriends were touch-up targets. Nothing like visiting the times of old as the city is a charm school for indulging in their biggest business; tourism.

Leonardo Airport is still the slowest airport in the West but the hustle and bustle of activity and the waves of human optic interests fill waiting time in the queue. Gather the baggage and resist the chance to Nazify the Carabinieri but prepare to broach the terror of inquisition at customs. Look about for the Limo man holding a wrongly written sign and proceed to Rome for \$100.00 fare.

It is May Day and the City is agog with holiday hustle, which thwarts any fast passage to the old Jewish Ghetto of Trastevere.



Cobblestone streets and alleys meander across the car filled arenas but somehow the driver negotiates into an ivy covered blind street and props in the centre. Disgorgement happens and the waiting phase for the Apartment key and the \$50 levy on delivery takes a renewed part of the collective conversation. Alessandro the pedalist appears and with customary Italian vigour gives a shakedown of the 16th Century Apartment and nearby surrounds.

The 2-bedroom apartment is bright and cheery and the only problematic area is the bathroom. Bathrooms are not a Roman problem it is an Italian problem whereby shower water cascades over the whole bathroom and one is constantly slipping off the pedestal.



Australian flag is pushed into the planter box and the Bombay Sapphire is deftly removed from its customs netted repository ready for a tonic infusion.

When in Rome start roaming and the first foray into Piazza Santa Maria leads to the first of many Cathedral encounters. The area is just filling with the evening diners and the search for a well priced eating establishment is in order. The piazzas have chairs and tables appearing like magic and the menu boards are bereft of the dreaded set price " Menu turistica" as charming spruiking in English by owners hoping to lure in those of unsound culinary mind.

The choice first up of Pizzeria San Callisto was perhaps to greater benchmark for future dining experiences for it was tasty, cheap and a Roman Experience. The recommended buffalo mozzarella and pomodoro was a gland wrencher plus the Artichoke bruschetta was the ideal primo entrée. With other tastes of porcini and salami plus red wine, coffees and lemoncello the E44 account was very agreeable to the 4 of us. An easy eye opener to what is touted as the second busiest tourist city in Europe.

Domesticity is in order for the next day and a walk to Viale Trastevere in the morning traffic for bread, tomato, cheese and Parma is the first task. What better way to provide breakfast on the banks of the Tiber at Ponte Garibaldi.

Sunny day, rushing water, bustling honking traffic, 4 unabashed touristimos sitting unconcerned in the middle with knife plate and a sense of historical displacement. Where was it that Horatio defended the bridge? I guess not at this Ponte disintegrating under the weight of traffic trauma and diesel doom.

A meander into the ruins of Torre Argentina nestled into the midstream of roadways lurks a cat sanctuary of perhaps recent history and pervading cats piss. Hard to believe beneath this pussytorium that the big man was topped by yon Cassca and the boys at the steps of the Pompeii theatre but there are no signs for historical elucidation.



Trip about the cobblestones and stumble around the corner and there languishes the Victor Emmanuel II Palace of dreams. Walking into these magnificent historical arenas seems a self-discovery scenario of archaeological heaven and so easy to draw down on the combined knowledge of the voguish guidebook and appear the newest expert on ancient Rome.

Dreaming continues as one wonders do I become unabashed like an American and wear a Rick Steve's guidebook as a badge of courage. The huge white "Wedding-cake" building of the Vic II hides IL Campidoglio from the uninformed just around the corner.

Slip out the guidebook from its holster to register the presence of Michelangelo designed steps that lead to the Marcus Aurelia's mounted statue.... Phew..... Tick and flick passed another classic ruin.

The view from the courtyard over the Forum is a must do and perhaps a breather to reclaim the senses which can be hydrated by "Il naso". This fountain of the purest of Roman aqueduct h20 is cold even in the middle of summer and the prerequisite water bottles are aqua-vated.

This forum pathway is a hustle, even off peaks, but a recharge of vigour in this bosom of civilisation pushes us on to the Palatino hill via a pathway from the IL Campidoglio end going against the forum flow of guided minions flush from visiting the Colosseum.



What's this laying in the bowels of the forum?

A rusty lean-to built on hallowed turf with a circle of rotting wreaths strewn on the dirt.

For here lays the turf that JC or Big Julies remains were asheda sight that besmirches the Ides of March and degrades this Caesareans memory just a pitiful garden shed amidst the ruins of history.

" Et Tu Brute?"...

"No thanks eaten already ".

The best method of getting to the ruins of Augustus and the views over Circus Maximus is to go up the Palatine pathway past the ticket box. The purchasing of tickets to the Hill also enables the prepurchase of Colosseum entry avoiding the fanning queue which forever is a part of Rome tourism.

The Farnese gardens at the top lead to the open underground passageway where Caligula was slashed to death. Seems voyeuristically weird to peer down on the spot where a maniacal man of history was killed so long ago.

The viewing platform in the Farnese provides the best view over the Forum onto the Basilica of Constantine a truly staggering edifice. The character of the Hill is only compromised by the sheer inadequacies of a single toilet perhaps it was an ancient urinal judging by the queue leading into the entrance?

Oh just piddle onto an officials office that is sited nearby; what the heck.

The walk around the Palatine hill is to perch above the sites of successive Caesars and possibly even the site of the original "Hut of Romulus." The interpretations are lurking in the books so one can only absorb so much without succumbing to historical amnesia.

To leave the Circus and surrounds is only a short stagger to the Colosseum and the true worth of iconic tourism.

What more can be said about this wonder drome than to attempt to find out how many Christians expired or how exotic was the wildlife slaughtered. This becomes the "Tomb of the Unknown Worrier"? A first day is spent massaging feet and slaking thirsts at every opportunity but the mind is curious at the sheer wonderment.

One poses the question what would "Big Julie" think coming down the Apian Way with trees of Calvourised Christians fringing the edges. It all seemed so Roman both in the incongruity of the history, place and penitence.

Rome was not made in May but this is the month to visit as the spring weather treats the senses well. Any visit to the Vatican must be treated in expeditionary terms so that the minimisation of any religious interference is negated.

There is a Saint for every day of the week and a holiday for any solar anomaly impacting upon the thronging tourist. Mecca is perhaps more crowded but the audience here is devoutly more feminine and multicultural. A million words cannot fill the secular fecundity but the weight of Idolatry prevails amid the Christian Pilgrims. Grandeur, marble, Carabinieri and priestly presence pervades the Basilica and history provides a dome.

The perfunctory visitation to the overcrowded Sistine is only permeated by the stentorian resonance of an accented "silencio" bursting over a jostling mass. The best escape on leaving the almost surreal blue dome is to take the "no entry" exit to be disgorged on to St Peters square and freedom.



The walk back along the Tiber provides a view of the Castle De Angelo sitting as a sentinel to guard St Peters Boulevard surrounded by Africans and knockoff merchandise.

The mind boggles when looking at the mass of building where Popes of the C15th were incarcerated with their devout followers. The Vatican ran a corridor to the Castle and when Spain's Carlo V laid siege the cloistered congregare lurked for months till help arrived. The walls are massive and towering over the top is a 50 ton sculptured chariot crowning the castle.

The Trattorias surrounding the Vatican have legendary status in a city of thieves so advance toward the city and eat without fear. Goose Trattoria/pizzeria beckons for a set price luncheon although the name belies its stature with a superb Buccatine Mattriciana, funghi pizza, Chiantis, lemoncellos and doppio coffees at only a cost E 18 per person.

The night brings out the move toward the footpath, as the Trastavere sidewalks become the feeding grounds of the local populace. The bars have been taken over by football aficionados and the hustle is everywhere as jockeying for space is at a premium. The alleys are tight, the cobblestones uneven but the sensual ooze of "Trasta Rasta" seeps into the soul.

Perched on a slanting seat as Vespers flirt with the sprawling tables and the loquacious chanteuses ply the café scene to the hilt. Ambience is almost a finite form as the visual senses suck the culture dry. The passeggiata plies these piazzas and the night is ongoing panoply of diners, drinkers and Romans eternalising this city.

Trastevere is central to all points and not far to the Piazza Navona requiring a negotiating of tight streets with exotic second hand shops bursting at the seams. The baroque piazza is an ancient Times Square with madcap activity and the fascinating Bernini's Fountain of the Four Rivers splashing silver. Here in the Campo di Fiori is the second heart of Rome only broken by the stentorian vista of the Senate with SS facsimile uniformed guards bleating out a message of oligarchy outside the entrance. The Versace suited wunderkinder flounced about the squadron of black Alfa Romeos waiting for the session to commence.



Into the face of the Guardia stepped a confrontational lone placard carrying protester waving a plastic sword. This was an opportunity to help the common man with cries of "Viva La Revolution" to add even more resonance to the farce.



Trevi fountain is the wishing well of history and the freshest place in what can be a hot city splashed by rivulets of green water across a marble riverbed backed by a cacophony of international tourists manoeuvring for photo space.

The signage on the palace backing the fountain shows a provenance of Dukes and assorted acolytes of the Popes. Trattorias line the streets on the road to the Spanish Steps an iconic guidebook entry in Roman sights to see and there is not much need to repeat the process.

The Pantheon is the crucible of what remains of Ancient Rome and is a possible visual Everest in a mountain range of antiquities as the sheer intensity of this original site wedged into everyday commerce is breathtaking.

The building has a cool dark presence exuding a demure tranquillity not altogether in keeping with its location. The dome has an open roof above its centre but signs inform there are 22 small holes in the floor to dissipate the rain.

This 1800-year-old floor looks like it was laid in recent times and an upward gaze questions how the ancients built such a dome. Close to the Pantheon is the 'ultimate coffee experience' according to Web forums and trip advisor guides.

The Gran Eustachio at Piazza Eustachio has accolades aplenty foisted into the psyche by a majority of American reviewers. The advice is to go both as a lifestyle and culinary experience. Buy a ticket, get into the queue and get coffee existentialism.

This aficionado's coffee was a sugar infused, fairy floss, creamer bomb served with ultimate disdain by a practising member of the aragonenti. Here omnipotence is enacted as an espresso religion interrupted only by the clientele.

From the Spanish steps one goes down the boulevard of broken wallets where the cognoscenti of Euro excess hammer D & C, Versace et al. The colours are Italian bright with the seasons lime greens and yellow leather bursting from shopfronts. Bargains as such do exist amid the "Double Tasmanian" wool suits and the Cashmere coats at E 195.

Rome is the ultimate city destination with nooks and niches to suit the most demanding visitor. The best surprise is the quality and pricing of food and wine subject to careful menu perusal. Why ask for recommendations when the quests for finding ones own best restaurant is a part of the experience.

Catching a train is the easiest way to depart Rome as long as the antennae for wallet removal are up. The Termini is an ant's nest of human activity but Trenitalia has not lost the Il Duce predilection for trains departing on time.

But for me there was no sign of pickpockets, Gipsies carrying plastic babies, fake Carabinieri asking for passports, just a city wallowing in an excess of tourism and doing it with aplomb.

Rome is a city for forays a week at a time whilst entering a Country that beckons you to be going for the small village indulgence.

