ROME ITINERARIES

In Rome you long for the country; in the country — ch mercantur! — you praise the distant city to the skies.
- Horace

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CHECKING IN | CHECKING OUT

In a League of Its Own: Rome's New Boutique Hotel

by **Christina Ohly**

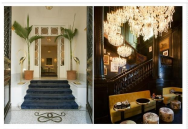
Get a lovely breakfast, see the sights, and end the day lounging at the pool at Palazzo Donna. All photos by Cherie Gil.

Rome can be a total onslaught of beauty and chaos. Fathom contributor Christina Ohly finds peace in the middle of it all at a design-driven hotel near Piazza del Popolo.

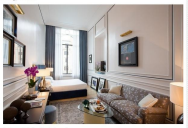
CHECKING IN

Overview

Set in a stunning 19th-century villa in the heart of Rome, Palazzo Donna is the newest (and possibly best) addition to the city's chic, boutique hotel scene. Located just steps from the bustling Piazza del Popolo, and in striking distance of the Tiber River, Spanish Steps, and gardens of Villa Borghese, the 30-room and suites are exciting, yes-cause in the middle of the city. Designer touches courtesy of architect Antonio Girardi abound. In addition to beautifully appointed, light-filled spaces — many featuring crystal chandeliers mixed with mid-century sofas, crisp white linens, and state-of-the-art bathrooms — there is also a lovely lush garden with a refreshing swimming pool. This extremely rare feature puts Palazzo Donna in a different league. As does the chicly L'Autre Donne bar, which is decorated with lithographs by Andy Warhol and Picasso and serves some of the smoothest aperitivos in town.



Honey, I'm home.



Lush, cozy interiors in a junior suite.

What's New

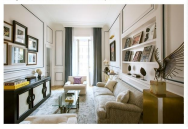
The hotel just opened in January so everything is technically new, but there are several recent additions worth noting. While not a spa hotel per se, you'll find that every kind of massage and treatment is available in-room with just a quick phone call. If room facilities, it's afterthought at most hotels, is nicely done with high-end, air-conditioned gym machines.

The members-only club downstairs looked positively sultry when I was there, but the real claim to fame has to be the petite swimming pool. I am still marveling at how the hoteliers got city approvals for this special feature.

Best of all: endless food and beverage options. This isn't like hotel dining, but rather like dining at an extremely aristocratic friend's house. Enjoy an Aperol spritz on the stunning rooftop terrace before a meal in L'Autre Donne downstairs.

What's on Site

Evening in the lush garden, nibbling chili-sautéed nuts served by the pool, and nobbing elbows with the beautiful people in the lounge makes Palazzo Donna a splendid destination. In addition to the L'Autre Donne bar, the refined hotel restaurant of the same name serves beautiful pastas and wonderful fresh juices in a pristine white space. The basement gym, something of a rarity in central Rome, is impressive. The Wi-Fi is fast and free, well-stocked minibars are free, too, and the most knowledgeable, kind front office/concierge team in town (Andrea and Clarmarie in particular) will cheerfully book you in at the the best restaurants, arrange car transfers, organize cooking classes, and reserve after-hours tours of nearby churches and museums.



Wish you were here.

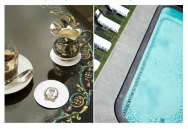
The Food

Breakfast is served in the exquisite L'Autre Donne restaurant, which takes on a more relaxed atmosphere and soundtrack in the morning hours. It truly feels like eating in a fab-luch, Michelin-star restaurant — and one with an expansive buffet that includes meats, cheeses, fruit and cereals, as well as an endless array of healthy (some) and eggs made to order.

Lunch is outstanding as well — especially when served under an umbrella at one of the thirty tables by the pool. Simple sandwiches, burgers, and elaborate pastas are all possibilities. The kitchen will gladly make you whatever you'd like to eat, 24/7.

In the Room

Designer Antonio Girardi left his mark at the ultra-hip D.O.M. Hotel Roma (for the same owners). It has a similar feel: midcentury furnishings rendered in tasteful fabrics in hues of navy and sea green by Love Puzza. Other touches pay homage to the palazzo's original art nouveau finishes and marble mosaics, but the rooms also incorporate clean lines, Venini glass fixtures, and modern luxuries. Turned the screen TVs, well-stocked minibars, and vintage-styles chart in rooms overlooking the pool area all make life feel like a lived-in escape, a home away from home. Some of the street-facing rooms reportedly have more noise, but I didn't notice this on my tour — strenuous shutters are pulled at night or the visitors can't hear a thing.



Respite from the splendid chaos of Rome.

Room with a View

My junior suite faced the pool and garden and I loved watching the afternoon record (!) love tourists morph into a chic resident set by 8 p.m.

This Place Is Perfect For

The 21-year-old set. Palazzo Donna doesn't have a "kid" feel; it is intimate, sexy, and spare. It would make an ideal stopover on the way to a honeymoon on the Amalfi Coast, and is also perfect for a long weekend jaunt.

But Not So Perfect For

Families with younger, young travelers, or families with multiple (3+) children. There are rooms and suites that are ready for families with older children, but this is an old, historic building that isn't well-suited to renting babies or families needing several adjoining rooms. It's ideal for teenagers who need to be in proximity (by law, I suppose), but also want separate spaces.

Try out the unforgettable brunch and breakfast options at the restaurant and bar.

Making it hard to leave.

CHECKING OUT

Neighborhood Vibe

The Piazza del Popolo area has everything a visitor could want: great restaurants, bars, shops, the Villa Borghese for long walks and great art, the Ara Pacis for culture, and some of the best stracciatella gelato in Rome at Gelateria dei Gracchi.

What to Do Nearby

Take a short stroll from the hotel and you'll find artistical treasures, including the beautifully baroque Santa Maria in Montesanto church and the Museo dell'Ara Pacis, the Altar of the Augustan Peace that dates from 13 B.C. and is now housed in a sleek Richard Meier-designed space.

The area has wonderful shops (including those of the larger luxury brands the Rhges number store here in the world's best; ask for things not on display) and cooler Roman finds as well. One of my favorites, Artisanal Cornucopia on the street Via dell'Oca, is the ultimate Mediterranean-inspired concept shop and features beautiful, locally-huge by Istanbul-based designer Mineli, statement-making silver cord jewelery by Roman designer Benedetta Bruzziches, and much more. Ask owner Elif Saltoprone for tips — she is a font of information about not only the store's curated collections, but also about the best hidden bars and under-the-radar restaurants.

On the food front, you'll be spoiled for choice in this area of town. You can do no better than a dish/ 18 dinner at the hotel's L'autre Donne. For something a bit less formal, try Da Bolognese or Rosati (Piazza del Popolo, 1a), both frequented by well-heeled tourists — but I love them anyway for solid pastas and waiters in crisp, white jackets. Best of all, however, might be drinks at the elegant Hotel Locarno. Be sure to ask for seating in the magical garden. A drink or a light lunch in the Hotel de Russie garden just around the corner runs a very close second.

Good to Know

The hotel is just nine miles from Rome's Ciampino Airport and it can, I swear, the most scenic ride I've ever had to an airport. The trip takes you over cobblestone streets, under viaducts, and through lush neighborhoods. I felt like Hadrian.

Dreamed to the nines.

Aside view of Roman architecture and blue skies.

PLAN YOUR TRIP

How to Get There

Rome Fiumicino Airport is 45 minutes from the hotel and is served by American Airlines, Delta, and Alitalia. As country flights also depart from this airport, and many to the rest of Europe (British Airways) as well.

BOOK IT

Rates start from $348. Click here for reservations.

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