

TRAVEL



VATICAN AND BEYOND: A panorama rewards those who make the dizzying climb up St. Peter's Dome. Explore Rome's top five gelato shops on **G4**.

Like hordes before us, we entered Rome through its northern gate.

We had rented a terrace apartment in an old marble-filled building in the Flaminio neighborhood, just outside the ancient city walls. Each day, we kept pace with Romans bustling to work and flowed through the Porta del Popolo, built in the late 1400s as a grand entrance to the city.

Centuries before we arrived, barbarian tribes (so named by the Romans), stormed in here and sacked the city. Martin Luther also traveled this way. He came in the early 1500s to live in a monastery, from which he observed the Church and the Pope close-up, just nine years before he and his ideas rocked the world. Later, there was Queen Christina of Sweden, who in 1654 converted to Catholicism, abdicated her throne and rolled into her adopted city through Porta del Popolo

HIGH ON ROME

The heart of the city holds some of the world's most beloved gems. To find them, just start walking.

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dressed as an Amazon and riding in a chariot.

Unlike the Visigoths and the Gauls, and unlike the queen, my family and a friend came in peace and attempted to blend in with the Romans. And while Luther may not have liked what he saw, we did — very much.

The first morning, in a haze of jet lag, we paused to get our bearings after passing under the arch. To our left, a ragged woman hoping for alms sat on the steps of Santa Maria del Popolo. Inside the church, works by Caravaggio, Raphael and Bernini belied the simple facade, its travertine dirtied by soot. With 10 days stretching before us, I figured the artwork could wait.

In front of us, the vast expanse of Piazza del Popolo made a warm welcome. Sun bounced off its cobblestones. In its corners, sculptures

See **ROME** on **G4** ►



The Ocean House at Post Ranch Inn. Photo by KODIAK GREENWOOD

Big Sur's mellow return to business

As Hwy. 1 sets to reopen after a landslide, the oceanside town is more chill than ever.

By NIKKI EKSTEIN • Bloomberg

When a million tons of rocks tumbled down the coast of Big Sur this past spring, the landslide added 13 acres to the region and buried California's scenic Hwy. 1 in 40 feet of dirt and gravel — the equivalent of 800 Olympic-sized swimming pools. It was just the latest blow for a tiny community: The

Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge had begun to fail in February after heavy winter storms caused slides along the coast, and it will remain closed until October.

Taken together, the weather events shut off access to an entire region of Southern California that's otherwise known for postcard-perfect vistas, switchback hiking trails, lighthouse-dotted beaches and, lately, as the setting of HBO's breakout hit "Big Little Lies." Now it's known colloquially as "Big Sur Island," bounded by the closing at Pfeiffer Canyon on the north and landslide-related barriers to the south.

But Big Sur is already doing big business — and for travelers, at least, it's better than ever.

"There's a silver lining for everything," said Caroline Beteta, president and chief executive of Visit California, the state's tourism marketing arm.

Because the highway is inaccessible to car traffic until the Pfeiffer Canyon Bridge reopens, travelers to Big Sur can for the first time walk or bike unimpeded along a 45-mile stretch of the Pacific coast.

See **BIG SUR** on **G5** ►

TOP FIVE GELATO SHOPS IN ROME

We arrived in Rome dreaming of victory — and chilly treats — thanks to a delicious competition. My three companions and I each chose the gelato shop we thought would be the best in the city, based on advance research. When our wanderers brought us near one of our picks, we'd stop in for scoops, one for each of us and another to share. Then came the taste-testing (the best part), and the scoring (the tedious part, using an elaborate formula devised by the lawyer among us). We added a fifth location after discovering its wonders near our rental apartment.

We forgot to set a reward for the champ, but that didn't matter. Given the heaps of gelato we enjoyed, we all won.

Shops are listed from best to, well, least best:

Gelateria la Romana: Our favorite spot looks like a pharmacy, with surfaces of gleaming chrome and white. Their science works. The gelato has the best creamy texture; tempting flavors include the lemony Crema dal 1947. (Across the Tiber River from Piazza del Popolo at Via Cola di Rienzo, 2; [gelateriaromana.com](#).)

Giolitti: The first sign this was a top choice: Italians waiting in a long line. The pretty pastel interior is more proof that the oldest gelato maker in Rome takes its products seriously. Customers can sit down (which costs extra) at marble-topped tables under chandeliers. (Near the Pantheon at Via Uffici del Vicario, 40; [giolitti.it](#).)

Fatamorgana: This shop's mix-masters blend the likes of basil, honey and walnut or almonds and cardamom to create their distinctively fresh flavors. I swooned over the chocolate-hazelnut "Bacio del Principe," the prince's kiss. (In the Monti neighborhood at Via degli Zingari, 5, and other locations; [gelateriafatamorgana.com](#).)

Fiocco di Neve: For the espresso drinkers in our group, this tiny store was a contender. That's because the treat of choice here is the insanely delicious "Affogato di Zabaione," a scoop of zabaione gelato (infused with Marsala wine) doused with espresso ("affogato" translates as "drowned"). If coffee is your thing, you *have* to try it. (Via del Pantheon, 51; no website.)

Alberto Pica: We went with high hopes — it came recommended by an Italian — but were only slightly impressed, mainly because the gelato felt heavy and grainy. Still, flavors are intense. Try the rice, a house specialty with a gentle sweetness and specks of rice. (Near the Jewish Ghetto at Via della Seggiola, 12; no website.)

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KERRI WESTENBERG • Star Tribune
At Giolitti, gelato servings come with big crispy cookies.

MY FAVORITE ROME RESOURCES

Rome is remarkably walkable, with delights — art, ancient ruins, great food — at every turn. You could easily enjoy days of aimless wandering. But for targeted strikes, I followed the advice of these great resources:

City Secrets, Rome: This unusual guide book is a compilation of insider tips from an eclectic mix — architects, authors, scholars, art curators — organized by neighborhoods. It led to many hidden gems.

Blue Guide, Rome: At times, I have found Blue Guides oppressive with their in-depth dissections of art, architecture and archaeology. In Rome, where history runs deep and nearly every church holds treasures, I turned to it again and again.

Elizabeth Minchilli: An American-turned-Roman (a fortune of marriage), Minchilli shares her knowledge through books including "Eating Rome," her blog "Elizabeth Minchilli in Rome," and an app, "Eat Italy." She also offers private tours and culinary experiences in the city and beyond. Plan ahead; I tried to book a wine-and-cheese day trip to Orvieto, but her schedule was full. Still, we ate quite well following her suggestions.

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Piazza del Popolo (seen here from Villa Borghese), was designed as a grand northern entrance to Rome. See more photos of the city at [startribune.com/travel](#).

HIGH ON ROME

◀ **ROME** from GI
representing the four seasons gazed at indifferent passersby. An obelisk pilfered from ancient Egypt in the early days of the Roman Empire soared. On stairs at its base, young people smoked cigarettes and worked their smartphones. A pair of matching churches, one behind scaffolding, marked the far side of the square. Radiating out from them, three main roads led more deeply into Rome. Which to take?

We opted for the center road and passed a restaurant called Dal Bolognese, after the region of Italy renowned for its cuisine, storefronts of Italian designers like a.testoni and Boggi, and leather goods stores. Clearly, we had chosen well. We wound through a maze of tight streets, where shopkeepers chatted with neighbors as they opened for business. A truck loaded with topiaries and bright flowers tooted its horn, nudging its way among pedestrians. Then we landed at our breakfast spot, a cafe that predates the United States.

At Antico Caffè Greco, circa 1760, we sat on red velvet banquettes set against art-covered walls. Officious servers in crisp black suits brought us pastries, cappuccinos and a hot chocolate nearly as thick as pudding.

When we stepped back outside, we practically stumbled onto the Spanish Steps. Just down the street, that staircase rose from Piazza di Spagna, surprisingly empty for one of the city's top attractions.

Such unexpected discoveries would occur again and again. Rome is strikingly compact — even as its hold on us looms large.

Within its ancient walls, just 12 miles around, lie many of the city's iconic gems: the Colosseum, the Pantheon, the Trevi Fountain. We walked nearly everywhere, moving between epochs in a matter of minutes. We shot past the 28 B.C. tomb of Augustus on our way to the Baroque Piazza Navona, all the while navigating the bustle of modern-day Rome.

Two tours worth taking

It could be said that I walked amid ancient Rome twice — or at least its marble. The first time came when I toured that era's Colosseum and Roman Forum. The second time came when I explored Vatican City.

The Forum is a romantic puzzle of tumbled buildings and suggestive columns, though it was once a gleaming plaza paved with marble and lined with marble temples and buildings. After the fall of the Western Roman Empire in the fifth century, Romans turned away from the Forum, cows grazed the grounds and some of the marble was hauled away to be used for the next big thing: St. Peter's Basilica.

"The Romans were great recyclers," said our tour guide, who painted vivid pictures of the Col-



A fresco, above, adorns the walls of Santa Maria Antiqua, a fifth-century church inside the Roman Forum. The Colosseum is remarkably intact for a building that opened in 80 A.D.



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osseum, the Roman Forum and the Palatine Hill, where the ruling class of the empire had lived. "The place had been abandoned, so it was like picking through a junk pile."

A spectacular junk pile, with remnants of temples that still reach to the sky, weathered marble blocks and a majestic symmetry that remains

with a small group for an early-morning tour of the Vatican. Our guide — petite but commanding — handed us earpieces and marched us to a line outside the Vatican Museums. Hundreds of people waited with us, a mere fraction of the number that would descend when the museums opened to the general public.

Once inside, she sped the group to the Sistine Chapel, where we could marvel at the crowning work by Michelangelo in relative peace. It was glorious. How could a man so cranky (he didn't want the job) and uncomfortable (he refused to lie down on scaffolding, as most ceiling painters did) and who had previously worked only as a sculptor (the Pope insisted he paint) create such beauty? Well, it is a holy space.

The neighborhood church

Most days, we roamed the city. One day, we rented bikes at Villa Borghese, a giant hilltop park with manicured gardens, a lake and sculptures and temples scattered in the greens. Another day, we explored the Borghese Gallery, a palace-turned-museum in the park that brims with enthralling Italian masterpieces. We explored the crooked streets of Trastevere, where we ate pizza next to multi-generational Italian families out for Sunday dinner. We shopped, bolstered with gelato. We tipped a street violinist wearing kelly green suede loafers, proving that Italians of any economic means know how to dress.

And every day, we passed by Santa Maria del Popolo on our way back home. Twice, I tried the church's door and found it locked. Just as often, I creaked the door open to find a service underway, a priest's singsong lulling a handful of parishioners.

On my last full day in Rome, I checked the church's schedule, eager to study the artwork tucked into its side chapels. Santa Maria would be open until 7 p.m. At 6:45, I arrived, heard a sermon underway and slipped into a back pew to wait. Communion came, and I witnessed a parade of takers: a tattooed hipster, a dusty workman, a woman in fur accompanied by a dog.

But when the service was over, it was clear I had missed my chance. The caretaker gently shooed out the parishioners, and me with them.

I had caught only glimpses of the Berninis and the Caravaggios after I rose from my pew. But Santa Maria is a working church for Romans — one whose artistic treasures are, literally, an aside — not a museum for tourists. In that way, it is much like Rome itself.

Outside the church, I heard the door lock behind me. I turned and walked through Porta del Popolo, and the wonders of Rome, one last time.