

The Secret Gardens of the Villa Borghese

Neglected for centuries and having fallen on tough times during World War II when they served as a cabbage-producing “war garden,” the secret gardens of the Borghese were revitalized and completely restored in the 1990s. A boon arrived when archivists working in the family papers discovered the seventeenth century plant lists, which garden historians used to make this botanically faithful to the original.

The gardens’ design is authentic to the period, but not necessarily their original layout here. Archaeological work during restoration revealed a paver here, a step there. But, mostly the garden design represents a synthesis of what we know about Baroque secret gardens in general. To get the best experience, act like a Borghese and ascend to the second floor of the casino from where the geometry is best experienced.

Paul Bennett

Paul Bennett is an award-winning journalist and co-founder of Context Travel, an organization of scholars and experts who lead in-depth walking seminars of the world’s greatest cities.

Bar De Angelis

Via di Priscilla 18-20

06 8620 0724

This little family-owned bar in Parioli-Salario is a bit off the tourist beaten-path, but is well worth the trek. Close to Villa Ada and Villa Nemorense (famous from Nanni Moretti’s movie Aprile), Bar De Angelis calls itself the home of Cremolato, a unique frozen dessert somewhere between crushed fruit and sorbetto, and quite hard to find in Rome, let alone Italy. The neighborhood, is borghese-buono, where Ciampi, the former president of Italy lives, and is sparkled with gorgeous little shops, like a fascinating toy soldier maker/restorer, and one of the best-kept coffee secrets — Arcioni (via Nemorense 57), on the corner of Piazza Crati, where you can consult with the barrista and they will roast and grind coffee to your specifications. Bar De Angelis, around now for generations, makes its cremolato only from March to September, and uses ripe, seasonal fruit, and very little if any sugar. The flavors that we die for are melon and figs.

Yotam Haber

Yotam Haber is a composer and the recipient of received numerous prizes and fellowships. He is Artistic Director of MATA Festival for Young Composers in New York City.

Roman Nuptials

Getting married on the Campidoglio is wonderful. Your names are posted

on one of the pilasters, should anyone object. The wedding is brief and, of course, in Italian. When the ceremony ends, attendants present the bride with flowers “from the mayor of the city of Rome.” Leaving the red ground-floor wedding room and walking out onto the Piazza del Campidoglio is amazing, especially when followed by a stroll through the Forum. I won’t tell you about the paperwork involved.

Michael Schwarting

Michael Schwarting is the director of the graduate program in urban design at the New York Institute of Technology.

Three Views of Rome

With sketchbook in hand, I have often enjoyed taking a picnic dinner up the many steps of Santa Maria in Aracoeli to watch the sunset through the dome of St. Peter’s. There aren’t many tourists around at that time of day, so you can have the view all to yourself.

Also, if you happen to be in Rome in the early spring, wander through the secret gated entrance at the base of the Campidoglio to the left of the first few steps. Walk to the top and take in the wisteria in bloom; the smell is intoxicating. Then pass across the Campidoglio and veer to the right, where a spectacular view of the Forum awaits. After April 1st, an alternate view can be had from the rooftop terrace of the Hotel Forum.

Jana Dambrogio

Jana Dambrogio, a rare-book and manuscript conservator and contemporary book artist, works as a Senior Conservator for the U.S. National Archives. She conserved a unique collection of ancient records at the Vatican Secret Archives Conservation Laboratory.

Baffetto 2

Piazza del Teatro di Pompeo

06 68210807; www.pizzeriabaffetto.it

Want the best pizza in the world? Sure, there are philosophical differences over thick crust or thin, chewy or crisp, Neapolitan or Roman. Baffetto settles the argument with the thinnest, crispiest crust on the planet. The toppings are fresh and fragrant. My personal favorite: capricciosa, with mozzarella, mushrooms, artichokes, sausage, and an egg dropped on the center, roasted with everything else in the raging wood oven. Baffetto is no secret to Romans: there is usually a long line stretching down beautiful Via Governo Vecchio. Less well known is Baffetto 2 in Piazza del Teatro di Pompeo, near Campo dei Fiori; same great pizza, usually without a wait.

Jeffrey Schiff

Jeffrey Schiff is a sculptor and a professor of art at Wesleyan University. He is a fellow of the American Academy in Rome and the Guggenheim Foundation, and held a Fulbright Senior Scholar Fellowship to India.

Villa Farnesina

via della Lungara 230

06 680 27 397; www.lincci.it

To see a Renaissance painting without the crushing crowds of the Vatican, visit the Villa Farnesina frescoes by Giulio Romano and other students of Raphael, as well as a painting of the Graces by the master himself. In another room, trompe l'oeil views of Rome painted by Peruzzi (the architect of the villa) in the early 1500s are also on view.

Vincent Buonanno

Vincent Buonanno is a collector of illustrated seventeenth and eighteenth century books on the architecture of Renaissance and Baroque Rome.

Ditta Annibale Gammarelli

Via Santa Chiara 34

06 688 01314

Unlike the large tourist emporia near the Vatican, the shops along via dei Cestari cater primarily to the clergy themselves. After hours of admiring the great monuments of Christian Rome, I often found it relaxing to come here and observe its personal side. The young nuns window-shopping offer an excellent reminder of the very human individuals who helped build this great religious capital. For those seeking more tangible rewards, the stores here offer decidedly unusual souvenirs. A favorite amongst savvy shoppers are the distinctively colored cardinal's socks at Ditta Annibale Gammarelli in via Santa Chiara.

Robert J. W. Cro

Robert J. W. Cro trained as an art historian and archaeologist before discerning a call to ordained ministry.

Puccini's Tosca

Many fans think of Puccini's super-melodramatic *Tosca* as the quintessential Italian operatic experience. The score has an intimate connection to Rome, not only because the premiere occurred here, but because each act takes place in a very specific Roman site: Act One plays in a side chapel at the Church of Sant'Andrea della Valle; Act Two in a room of the Palazzo Farnese; and Act Three upon the ramparts of the Castel Sant'Angelo. A *Tosca* fanatic can create his own pilgrimage to these three spots, imagining exactly where the tenor Cavaradossi might

have painted his Madonna in church, the palazzo office where the baritone police chief Scarpia could have been murdered, and the castle rooftop ledge from which the soprano Tosca might have jumped into the Tiber. The Tosca sites are open to the public, although the Palazzo Farnese, which is now the French embassy, has limited access.

Robert Marx

Robert Marx has served as the director of the theater program at the National Endowment for the Arts and the New York State Council on the Arts, and was executive director of the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center. Florentines know it: they come as schoolchildren to this surpassingly strange, disconcerting museum unlike any other. Part is a hodgepodge collection of taxidermy, gorillas, quetzals, and tapeworms in one silent room after another. The eerie displays smell faintly of preservative, and the visitor wanders in solitude. But this is only the beginning; La Specola's true treasure is waxworks. Since the collection's beginning in 1775, past the death of its founder, Grand Duke Pietro Leopoldo di Lorena, in 1792, and through much of the nineteenth century, the collection has continued to grow ...

Sallie Tisdale

Writer

VENICE

An Enchanted Evening

Board no. 1 boat at San Marcuola to San Zaccaria

Board no. 82 for return to San Marcuola

I take my favorite guests for an enchanting night-time boat ride down the Grand Canal on the vaporetto, the public water bus. Armed with luscious gelati from Il Gelatone (Rio Terrà della Maddalena, Cannaregio 2063, 041 72 06 31 — near the Casinò on Strada Nova), we board the No. 1 boat at San Marcuola and try to score a seat out front, where there's nothing between us and the dark water. We cruise past magical palaces and under the Rialto and Accademia bridges to magnificent Saint Mark's.

Disembarking at San Zaccaria, we cross the nearby bridge for the landing stage for line No. 82 (the one via San Giorgio, not Rialto.) This transports us via the broad Giudecca Canal and then the vast silent port precincts, eventually looping back to the railway station and

San Marcuola.

Gillian Price

Writer of hiking guides

Museo Correr

Piazza San Marco 52, entrance in Ala Napoleonica
041 240 52 11; www.museiciviviceneziiani.it

Venice is beyond belief — more fantastic than one's most fanciful inventions. As most of the city is well-known, I will highly recommend one of its secret places. For reasons I can't begin to understand, the Museo Correr has been practically empty when I've gone to Venice, while the Galleria dell'Accademia has been crowded. The Accademia is a great museum, true, and it should be seen. But the Correr is not far behind. It is in the palazzo that defines one side of the Piazza San Marco, above Florian's, where elegant people sit by an orchestra, watching the theater of life. Beyond the Correr's Venetian historical collections, at the far end and up the stairs again, there is a beautiful collection with Bellinis and Carpaccios. Carpaccio's *Courtesans* is one of the most interesting paintings around, to my painter's eye. Easel-sized, mysterious, quiet. Felice Casorati based his 1921 painting *Two Sisters* on this work.

Alan Feltus
Painter

Basilica di San Marco

Piazza San Marco
www.basilicasanmarco.it

The hush of evening falls. The tourists have gone. With the lights dimmed, the dazzling beauty of the church is subdued. A few people come in before the evening Mass and whisper among themselves. Along the wall at the end of the left transept you sit on a long, plain bench, wood mounted on stone. Lean against the cool wall. Touch it. Breathe the silence. Look across the great reach of space toward the high window, where natural light fades. In the mysterious half-darkness, the Madonna Nicopeia looks comfortable in her niche, for she has been at home here for about eight hundred years. Just before the Mass, the lights go on everywhere, blazing on the mosaics and flooding the place with a shower of gold. At a very human level, this is death and rebirth.

Mary Jane Phillips–Matz
Musicologist and biographer

Riviera

Fondamenta delle Zattere Ponte Lungo 1473
041 522 76 21; www.ristoranteriviera.it

Lovely outdoor location on embankment facing Giudecca canal. Limited outdoor seating. Simple pastas and risottos, good fish, chicken with cardoons sometimes, *fegato alla veneziana* usually.

Marcella Hazan
Chef and cookbook author

VENETIAN ISLANDS

Church of the Redentore

1577–1592, Andrea Palladio

The church of the Redentore, by Palladio (completed after his death), was built in gratitude for salvation from the Plague and is best visited the third Sunday in July, during the Feast of the Redeemer. You should do it right, starting on the San Marco side of the canal, and crossing the pontoon bridges built for the occasion to take you over the Grand Canal and the Giudecca Canal to the church. If you do this, you will probably not get the Plague (it's worked for me).

Rona Goffen

Art historian

Watching the Ships Go By

For my money, watching the ships go by is the best thing to be done in Venice, and it is best done by sitting on the quayside below the Dogana, at the tip of the Giudecca. From here you can see in your mind's eye the gilded galleons of *la Serenissima* returning from the east, trailing the ensigns of defeated enemies, and in your real eye the great, gaudy cruise ships which, sailing in hardly less splendidly, bring yet more wondering pilgrims to this seaport of delight.

Jan Morris

Writer

San Lazzaro Monastery

Open 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. daily.

Home of Mechitarists (the Armenian Catholics), San Lazzaro has the third largest Armenian manuscript library in world, a marvelous collection of Kütahya eighteenth-century pottery, and a charming garden. Byron used to row across the lagoon and helped the monks produce the first Armenian/English dictionary. You can take the vaporetto from Venice or hire a rowboat from the Lido.

John Carswell

Curator and art