

Centro Storico Walk 2

Featured Sights: *Pantheon, Museo Altemps, Piazza Navona, Campo dei Fiori, Piazza Farnese, Palazzo Farnese*

We'll be starting this walking tour near where we ended the last one, at the **Pantheon**. If you're in need of sustenance the Piazza della Rotonda is filled with cafes from which to choose, including a McDonald's. There's also a supermarket (Spar) nearby at Via Giustiniani #18 if you want to pick up a bottle of water or some snacks for the walk.

From the Pantheon, take the Via del Pantheon, which turns into the Via della Maddalena, to Via delle Copelle and turn left.

As you pass through Via Sant'Agostinare stop in the **Basilica di Sant'Apollinare**. The main attraction in this church is the remains of Saint Monica. Though not artistically thrilling, how often are we able to be so close to a saint.

From here continue down Via Sant'Agostinare to Piazza

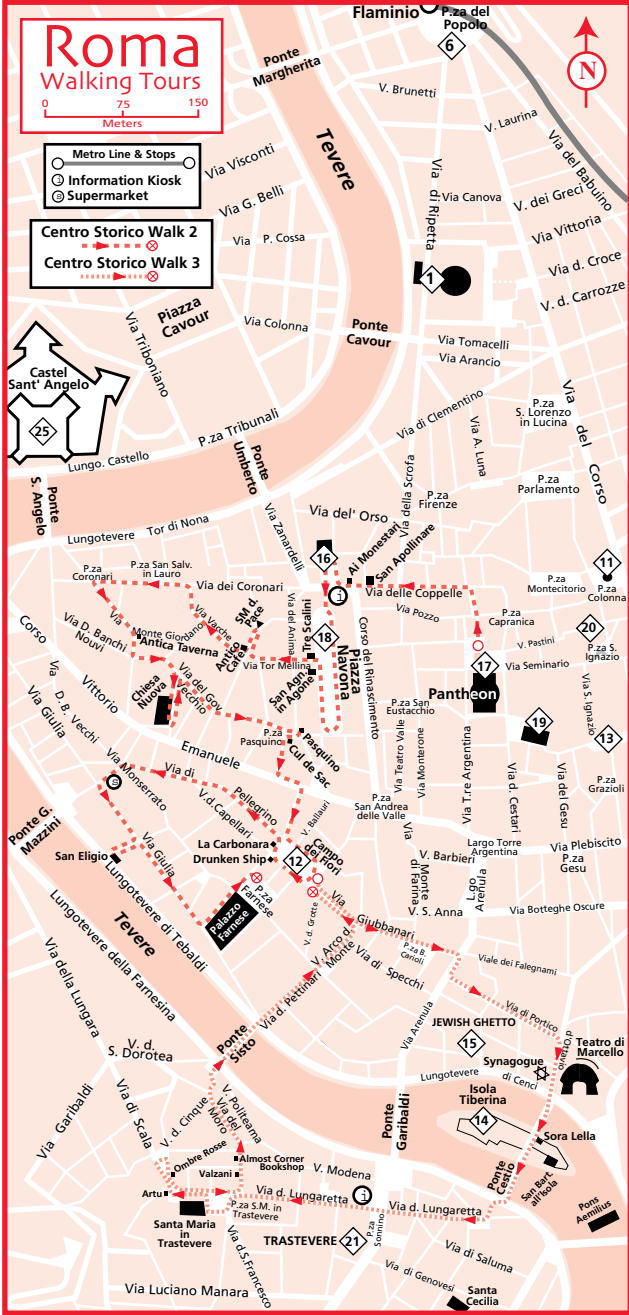
Cinque Lune where you'll find the wonderful little store:

Ai Monesteri (*Corso Rinascimento 72*). Here you will find all sorts of products made with loving care by monks and nuns throughout Italy including jams, jellies, liqueurs, scents, soaps and more. (Building currently being renovated.)

Around the corner to the right is the **Museo Altemps** (*Piazza Sant'Appolinare 48*). Visit here to see how the ancient Roman aristocracy lived. Filled with a legendary collection of ancient statues of pagan gods, fauns, satyrs, nymphs, athletes and warriors. This is a one of a kind museum in a unique palazzo evoking the ambiance of an ancient era.

When finished here, exit straight ahead, cross the piazza and traverse the busy street before entering the next destination: Piazza Navona.

Take some time to notice the brief excavation to the right of the entry. This clearly shows the remnants of the founda-



tion for the **Circus Domitianus** that was inaugurated in 81 CE and which now gives form and shape to Piazza Navona. It also gives us an insight into how, over the ages, silt, dirt, dust and refuse have all piled on top of one another to raise the level of Rome to its current level.

Now let's enter one of Rome's most famous squares. At 240 meters long and 65 wide the Piazza Navona preserves the dimensions of an ancient track where gladiators fought, horses raced, and at times naval battles were contested after the arena had been flooded.

In the center of the piazza is Bernini's spectacular **Fontana dei Fiumi** erected in 1651. It features a central rocky structure that supports an obelisk surrounded by four giant statues representing the Nile, the Danube, the Ganges, and the Rio della Plata.

Nearby, on the western side of the piazza stands the church of **Sant'Agnese in Agone**. It was on this location that myth tells us Saint Agnese had her clothes ripped off prior to her execution, but was then miraculously covered by a prodigious growth of her hair to preserve her saintly modesty. Though her purity was pre-

served her life was lost, as she was executed anyway. Back in the real world, the church was completed by Francesco Borromini around 1652.

Take note of one of the statues on Bernini's *Fontana dei Fiumi* and how it is covering his face in disgust as it looks away from Borromini's church. Some speculate that this is a result of the intense rivalry between the two artists. Others say it is because the church was built on the site of a former brothel. You make the call.

At the northern end is the *Fontana di Nettuno*, the basin of which was carved by Giacomo della Porta in 1546. And at the southern end, the *Fontana del Moro* was designed by Bernini and features the statue of a Moor fighting with a dolphin. If you're tired or want some sustenance, try a world famous café:

Tre Scalini (# 28, Web: www.paginegialle.it/trescalini). An ideal spot to absorb the beauty of the piazza and grab an ice cream cone, coffee, or other snack.

Now we are going to take a short stroll through one of Rome's most characteristic

local neighborhoods. Filled with twisting, winding cobblestone streets, here you will find haven from the hordes of tourists that thunder through the rest of Rome. Off the beaten path, and filled with some great cafes, restaurants, as well as a sense of ancient peace and serenity, to many this area is the true heart of Rome.

From the Tre Scalini head down the Via Sant' Agnese in Agone, which turns into the Via Tor Mellina then the Via della Pace. At the corner of the Via della Pace is:

Antico Caffè della Pace (#3-7). Beautifully vine covered, this is a great place to stop for sustenance and to savor the ambiance of this area.

After a brief respite, as you face the café, go down the angled Via della Pace to the right to the beautiful **Santa Maria della Pace**. Known mainly for its Raphael fresco of the four sybils, each of whom holds a scroll upon which is transcribed a revelation about the end of the world.

After your church visit, head back to the café, and turn right. Follow this leg of the Via della

Pace to the Via Vacche which turns into the Via della Vetrina. Take a left at Via dei Coronari, go past the Piazza di S. Salvatore in Lauro and head to Piazza Coronari.

There are antique stores galore in this section, so feel free to explore. Also, take the time to head down side streets. The beauty of this section of the walking tour is in the overall ambiance of the whole area.

Take a left onto Via Panico, which turns into Via Monte Giordano. As it bears to the left at the Antica Taverna (#12) take a right onto the teeny tiny Vicolo dell'Avica that leads to the Via del Governo Vecchio. Take a left onto this street then an immediate right onto the Via Chiesa Nuova. Follow this to the Chiesa Nuova.

Though called the new church, **Chiesa Nuova** was finished in 1605 on the sight of a previous church, Santa Maria in Vallicella. This is a typical counter reformation style church generally typified by a double-storied triple part façade with scrolls. The interior is of one huge hall-like nave, with a shallow apse and lateral chapels. The inside also contains a lush display of stucco and gold whirls

of painted angels and spiraling clouds, and swirls of blue and crimson draperies. All created by Pietro da Cortona (Pietro Berrettini), seventeenth-century Rome's most sought-after ceiling painter, his frescoed vaults over the nave (St. Philip's Vision of our Lady and the Falling Beam), cupola (Trinity in Glory), and apse (Assumption of the Virgin) are bright, dramatic and immediately appealing.

Apart from these frescoes, the Chiesa Nuova's greatest treasures are three early (1607-1608) paintings by **Peter Paul Rubens**: over the main altar, "Virgin, Child, and Angels," and on either side, "St. Gregory the Great with SS. Maurus and Papius," and "St. Domitilla with SS. Nereus and Achilleus."

When you leave the church, take a left back up the Via Chiesa Nuova to the Via del Governo Vecchio. Take a right. This will lead you to the Piazza Pasquino.

At the far end of this piazza is the *Pasquino*, one of Rome's "talking" statues. In centuries past, when public and open discourse of rulers was not advised, this statue was one of those in Rome where satirical

comments were clandestinely attached in the dead of night by political commentators who wanted to share their ideas with the rest of the populace. Frowned on by the authorities, the practice was tacitly accepted to allow the disgruntled some outlet for their frustration.

If you're hungry, in the Piazza Pasquino can be found a superb place to grab a bite to eat:

Cul de Sac (# 73) A superb wine bar with light snacks and an extensive wine list.

When done here, take a left out of Cul de Sac, take a left onto the Via Leutari to the busy Via Vittorio Emanuele II. Cross the street, go to your left, and take a right into the Piazza della Cancelleria which leads to the popular Campo dei Fiori.

There is a market here every morning except Monday from around 6:00am until 1:00pm where you can get all sort of fresh produce, assorted foods, and dry goods. This piazza is also a great place to come at night for dinner and drinks:

La Carbonara (#23). Though a little touristy when the accordion player comes around, this place serves great food

including the best spaghetti alla vongole verace I've ever had.

The Drunken Ship (# 20/21, www.drunken-ship.com). American owner Regan Smith has created a wild and raucous US style bar in one of Rome's oldest piazzas. It has hopping music, upbeat crowds, tasty light food, draft beer and bilingual and beautiful waitresses. This is the place to come to meet fellow travelers, foreigners living in Rome, or locals and party the night away.

When done here, take the street that was on the right as you entered the piazza, the Via del Pellegrino.

This entire area, from the Campo dei Fiori towards St. Peters and bordered by the Lungotevere and Corso Vittorio Emanuele is filled with antiques store, artisan work shops, and more. This is another great place to explore, so please feel free to deviate from the walking tour and head down side streets.

Follow the Via San Pellegrino as it curves around to the Vicolo della Moretta and take a left. Follow this to the Via Giulia and take a left.

The Via Giulia slices through Rome's historic district as a wide, straight avenue. It replaced a rabbit-warren of alleys, where gangs of brigands and pickpockets would prey upon pilgrims. Today this area is one of the city's poshest addresses.

Note the archway at the end of Via Giulia bedecked with ivy. More than a great spot for a photo op, it is also a history lesson. This archway used to be a part of a private bridge that once spanned the entire Tiber River linking the Palazzo Farnesina on the other side with the Palazzo Farnese on this side. The Farnese family had some pull in centuries past.

On a side trip from the Via Giulia, duck to the right down the Vicolo Sant'Eligio to see the church of Sant'Eligio degli Orefici.

This church was Raphael's first architectural project and is often considered one of the purest expressions of Renaissance architecture (1516). A cupola crowns this small beautiful structure, laid out in an austere Greek cross plan. Though the church is damp, somewhat gloomy, heavily restored and rarely open, it is

nonetheless one of the area's hidden treasures. One which most tourists miss.

After visiting this church, head back to the Via Giulia, turn right and take it to the Via Farnese, which is at the ivy covered arch way. Take a left onto the Via Farnese.

The large building on your right is the **Palazzo Farnese**, partially

designed by Michelangelo, and is now the French Embassy. At the end of this road is the **Piazza Farnese**. This walking tour is now ended but please feel free to take some time wandering around this area. There are artisan workshops to discover and great local cafes and restaurants to stumble upon. The next walking tour commences in the Campo dei Fiori, which is through one of the three streets in front of the Palazzo Farnese.