

Rome, Florence, Naples

■ Rome

Brief history of Rome

The founding of Rome goes back to the very early days of civilisation. It is so old, it is known today as 'the eternal city'. Early Rome was governed by kings, but after only seven of them had ruled, the Romans took power over their own city and ruled themselves.

Instead of a king, they had a council known as the 'senate' which ruled over them. This was the start of the 'Roman Republic'.

The word 'Republic' itself comes from the Latin (the language of the Romans) words '*res publica*' which mean 'public matters' or 'matters of state'.

The senate under the kings had only been there to advise the king. Now the senate appointed a consul, who ruled Rome like a king, but only for one year. This was a wise idea, as, in that way, the consul ruled carefully and not as a tyrant, for he knew that otherwise he could be punished by the next consul, once his year was up.

The Roman Republic was a very successful government. It lasted from 510 BC until 23 BC – almost 500 years. In

comparison, the United States of America has only existed since 1776 – less than 250 years.

The greatest challenge the Roman Republic faced was that of the Carthaginians. Carthage was a very powerful city in North Africa which, much like Rome, controlled its own empire. The fight between the two sides was a long one and took place on land and on sea.

The most famous incident was when the great Carthaginian general Hannibal crossed the mountain chain of the Alps to the north of Italy with all his troops, including his war-elephants, and invaded the country. However, Rome in the end won and Carthage was completely destroyed in the year 146 BC.



Rome's most famous citizen was no doubt Julius Caesar. He was a Roman politician and general who, without having any orders to do so, conquered the vast territory of the Gauls to the north of his province in France.

In the year 49 BC, Caesar crossed the small river between his province and Italy, called the river Rubicon, and conquered Rome itself, which he then ruled as a dictator. His military campaigns also took him to Egypt, where he met the famous Cleopatra. His life was ended suddenly when he was infamously murdered in the senate in Rome.

The Roman empire in the end was overrun by millions of Barbarians from the north and east of Europe. It is believed that two or three times in history, huge migrations took place across Europe, where peoples moved to settle in new territories. The great migration proved too much for the Romans to stop. Their armies were designed to defeat other armies, not entire populations flooding toward them. The collapse was completed when Rome itself was conquered by the Visigoth Odoacer and his men in the year AD 476.

But what is generally referred to as 'the Fall of Rome' doesn't include the eastern empire. This, with its centre in Constantinople, managed to hold on for almost another thousand years until it was eventually conquered by the Turks under their leader Mohammed II in the year AD 1453.

Tourist Attractions in Rome

With wonderful palaces, ancient churches and basilicas, grand Roman monuments, ornate statues and graceful fountains, Rome has an immensely rich historical heritage and cosmopolitan atmosphere. Here is a selection of the most important tourist attractions and sights of the 'Eternal City' – a complete list would include hundreds of monuments!



1. Colosseum

The Colosseum is the largest and most famous amphitheatre in the Roman world. Its construction was started by the emperor Vespasian of the Flavian dynasty in 72 AD and was finished by his son Titus in 80 AD. The Colosseum was capable of holding some 50,000 spectators who could enter the building through no less than 80 entrances. The Colosseum today is a major tourist attraction in Rome with thousands of tourists paying to view what is left of the interior arena.

2. St Peter's Basilica

The centre of the Catholic world and a major tourist attraction, the Basilica of St Peter is a huge church: with an interior height of 120m, the space shuttle, together with its booster rockets, could fit inside, as could the Statue of Liberty. The basilica stands on the traditional site where Peter, the apostle, who is considered to be the first pope, was crucified and buried. Construction on the current building began in 1506 and was completed in 1615. Many famous artists worked on the complex and its surroundings: Michelangelo designed the dome while Bernini designed the great St Peter's Square.

3. Pantheon

One of the best preserved Roman buildings, The Pantheon was built in 126 AD as a temple for all the Roman gods. The temple has served as a Roman Catholic Church since the 7th century. The Pantheon consists of a large circular portico with three ranks of huge granite Corinthian columns. The portico opens into a rotunda which is topped with a concrete dome with a central opening: the oculus. Almost two thousand years after it was built, the Pantheon's dome is still the largest unreinforced concrete dome in the world.

4. Vatican Museums

Founded by Pope Julius II in the 6th century, the Vatican Museums inside the Vatican City boast some of the world's most important relics. Attractions of the museums include the spiral staircase, the Raphael Rooms and the exquisitely decorated Sistine Chapel. Under the patronage of Pope Julius II, Michelangelo painted the chapel ceiling between 1508 and 1512. Today the ceiling, and especially The Last Judgment, are widely believed to be Michelangelo's crowning achievements in painting.

5. Trevi Fountain

Completed in 1762 from a design by Nicola Salvi, this world famous Baroque fountain features a mythological sculptural composition of Neptune, god of the sea, flanked by two Tritons. The location of the Trevi fountain marks the



terminus of the ancient Aqua Virgo aqueduct and is so named on account of its position at the junction of three roads ('tre vie'). The fountain was the setting for an iconic scene in Fellini's film *Dolce Vita* starring Anita Ekberg and Marcello Mastroianni. Since then, it has become one of the most popular Rome tourist attractions. The legend says that anyone who throws a coin in the fountain shall one day return to Rome.

6. Spanish Steps

A truly monumental stairway of 135 steps, the Spanish Steps were built with French funds between 1721-1725. The steps are usually very crowded, attracting tourists as well as locals who use it as a gathering place. Each year in May, the steps are decorated with pink azaleas. At the foot of the Spanish Steps is the Piazza di Spagna (Spanish square) and the Fontana della Barcaccia, a sober fountain designed by Gian Lorenzo Bernini.

7. Roman Forum

Located in the small valley between the Palatine and Capitoline Hills, the Roman Forum (or Forum Romanum in Latin) was for centuries the heart of ancient Rome: the site of triumphal processions and elections, venue for public speeches, and nucleus of commercial affairs. The Forum today is a sprawling ruin of architectural fragments and includes the Arches of Septimius Severus and Titus, the Temple of Antoninus Pius and Faustina and the Temple of Saturn.



8. Castel Sant'Angelo

Castel Sant'Angelo began life as the mausoleum of the Emperor Hadrian, built between 135 and 139 AD. Later, it was turned into a residence and castle by medieval Popes. The building was used as a prison until 1870, but now houses a museum.

9. Piazza Navona

One of the most famous of Rome's many squares, Piazza Navona was established towards the end of the 15th century, and preserves the shape of the Stadium of Domitian that once stood here. Built by Emperor Domitian in 86 AD, the stadium, which had a larger arena than the

Colosseum, was mainly used for festivals and sporting events. The buildings surrounding the square stand where the spectators once sat. Today, the square features no less than three magnificent fountains and is an immensely popular place to sip a cappuccino, shop, and watch street performers.

10. Campo de' Fiori

Campo de' Fiori is a rectangular square south of Piazza Navona used as a marketplace during the day, and partying centre for college students and tourists at night. The name was first given during the Middle Ages when the area was then a meadow.



■ Florence

Brief history of the Renaissance in Florence

A strong economic development set the stage for the creative movement known as the Renaissance. The city maintained its reputation for innovation from the 14th to 16th century. There were a dozen artists' guilds throughout the city, and Florence exported massive amounts of high quality wool and other textiles to Italy and Europe.

Many of the era's most influential artists flocked to the city to create their masterpieces, including Michelangelo, Botticelli, Ghirlandaio and Leonardo da Vinci. Their frescoes, sculptures, architecture and paintings are still preserved throughout the city and are major points of interest to visitors from around the world. No brief history of Florence can ignore the extensive influence of the Medici family. They had been involved in Florentine politics from around the 1430s. In 1520, the family commissioned the politician and philosopher, Niccolò Machiavelli, to write a history of Florence, but it wasn't published until after his death because it revealed too many details of their activities. In 1527, the Florentine government finally expelled the Medici and re-established a republic.



However, the family employed the support of both the Emperor and the Pope to declare war on Florence, and, after two attempts to regain power, became hereditary dukes of Florence in 1537. In 1569, they became the Grand Dukes of Tuscany, ruling the territory for the following two centuries. In 1743 Anna Maria Luisa died, the last of the Medici. The Medici inheritance was bequeathed to Florence and became the basis of the Uffizi Gallery collection.

Tourist attractions in Florence

Florence, the capital city of Italy's Tuscany region, is internationally esteemed for its high concentration of Renaissance art and architecture. Because it served as a wealthy and important centre for medieval trade and commerce, the city gave birth to the Italian Renaissance movement. Simulating one enormous outdoor art museum, the city of Florence attracts millions of tourists every year.

Here is an overview of the top tourist attractions in Florence.

1. Santa Maria del Fiore

Dominating the panoramic view of Florence is the Santa Maria del Fiore, the domed cathedral that is often called the Duomo. Known today as the world's largest masonry dome, this majestic cathedral features 600 years worth of stunning architecture and art works. From its beautiful Gothic facade of red, green and white marble to its elaborate interior of stained-glass windows, mosaics, frescoes and bronze statues, the Duomo complex also includes the impressive structures of the Baptistery and Giotto's bell tower. A climb to the top will reward tourists with incredible views of Florence and the surrounding valley.

2. Ponte Vecchio

Spanning the Arno River, the Ponte Vecchio is one of Florence's oldest and most photographed bridges. Noted for its three segmented arches, the bridge was first built by the Etruscans and later rebuilt in the 14th century. The bridge's most striking feature is the line of high-end jewellery shops along each side. Many visitors come here to shop and take photographs. Night time presents stunning views when the lighting from the bridge is reflected upon the water.



3. Uffizi Gallery

Regarded today as one of the world's greatest art museums, the Uffizi Gallery is located off the Piazza della Signoria. This former palace was first built in 1560 to house the offices of the city magistrates. After the ruling dynasty of the Medici family relinquished its power, the palace evolved into an art gallery to showcase its stunning collection of Renaissance art treasures. Opened to the public since 1765, the museum offers thousands of art works by masters like Michelangelo, Botticelli, Leonardo da Vinci and Titian.



4. Piazza della Signoria

Serving over the centuries as an important centre for politics and the site of several historic events, the Piazza della Signoria is a beautiful square centred among some of the top attractions in Florence.

It is here that tourists can visit remarkable places like the Palazzo Vecchio, the Uffizi Museum, the Palazzo Uguccioni, the Loggia de Lanzi and the nearby Ponte Vecchio bridge. This town square is also a treasure trove of notable sculptures such as Michelangelo's Statue of David, the Fountain of Neptune, Hercules and Cacus as well as Perseus with the Head of Medusa.

5. Palazzo Vecchio

One of Florence's most significant buildings is the Palazzo Vecchio, a grand palace overlooking the Piazza della Signoria. Built in the 12th century, the Palazzo Vecchio housed the powerful Medici family as well as Florence's supreme governing body for six centuries. Since 1872, it has served in part as a museum and as the city town hall. This impressive palace has a wealth of artifacts and art works that include beautiful frescoes, sculptures, painted ceilings, intricate carvings and tapestries that all depict historic and Biblical events.



6. Basilica di San Lorenzo

Situated at the centre of the city's main market district, the Basilica di San Lorenzo is one of the oldest churches in Florence and was the burial place of all the principal members of the Medici family. The church, originally designed by Filippo Brunelleschi in the 15th century, is an early example of ecclesiastical Renaissance architecture. The façade of this church was never completed, giving it a striking, rustic appearance. Inside the church is pure Renaissance neo-classical splendour.

7. Boboli Gardens

Located behind the Palazzo Pitti, the Boboli Gardens were created by the Medici family in the 16th century. The beautiful and varied Italianesque garden is home to a large number of statues and fountains. The gardens have gone through several stages of enlargement and restructuring work. They were enlarged in the 17th century



and have come to form an outdoor museum of garden sculpture that includes Roman antiquities as well as later works.

8. Piazzale Michelangelo

The Piazzale Michelangelo is a large, partly pedestrianised square located across the Arno River from the centre of Florence. From the square, visitors have a magnificent view over the city.

9. Palazzo Pitti

The Palazzo Pitti is a large 15th century palace situated on the quieter south bank of the Arno river. The palace was the residence of Florence's rulers until 1919, when it was handed over to the Italian state, which transformed the palace into a museum complex. In spite of its metamorphosis from royal residence to a state-owned public building, the palazzo, sitting on its elevated site overlooking Florence, still retains the air and atmosphere of a private collection in a grand house.



10. Mercato Nuovo

The Mercato Nuovo is a covered market located in the historic centre of Florence. It is so called to distinguish it from the Mercato Vecchio, located in the area of today's Piazza della Repubblica. Initially, it was intended for the sale of silk and luxury goods and then for the famous straw hats, but today mainly leather goods and souvenirs are sold. Its biggest attraction is the Fontana del Porcellino (Piglet Fountain). Rubbing the animal's nose would ensure a visitor's return to Florence. The original from the 16th century can be found at Palazzo Pitti.

Naples

Brief history of Naples

The city of Naples was probably founded by the Greeks around the eighth century BC. This 'new town' or 'Neapolis' has been absorbing the influences of its settlers and invaders ever since. Romulus Augustulus, last emperor of the Roman Empire, was imprisoned here after being overthrown in 476. In the sixth century, Naples was conquered by the Byzantines, and it was one of the last duchies to fall to the all-conquering Normans in 1039, as they founded the Kingdom of Sicily. In 1266 Naples and the kingdom of Sicily were given by Pope Clement IV to Charles of Anjou, who moved the capital from Palermo to Naples. In 1284 the kingdom was split in two, and stayed that way till 1816, when the kingdom of Two Sicilies was formed. In between, Naples had been under the rule of Spain, Austria, and the Bourbons, and had (briefly) been a Jacobin republic. Finally, in October 1860, it became part of the new Italy.

Tourist attractions in Naples

With a history that stretches back to the Bronze Age, Naples is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places on Earth. The

city boasts the largest Old Town district in Europe and has more historic churches than any other city in the world.

1. Naples National Archaeological Museum

One of Naples's top attractions, the Naples National Archaeological Museum is the best place to view art and artifacts recovered from the Mount Vesuvius eruption of 79 AD. Alongside the bronze statues, frescoes and mosaics rescued from the buried sites are everyday objects like shop signs and cookware. The museum's most famous artwork is the Alexander Mosaic, dating from circa 100 BC, originally from the House of the Faun in Pompeii. It depicts a battle between the armies of Alexander the Great and Darius III of Persia. Other exhibits include relics unearthed from archaeological sites in and around Naples. The museum is also home to the Farnese Bull, the largest single sculpture from antiquity ever recovered. The Hellenistic piece featuring Dirce tied to a wild bull, dates back to the 2nd century BC.



2. Spaccanapoli

A long narrow street that bisects the historic centre of Naples, Spaccanapoli gives visitors an introduction to the sights and attractions of the vibrant southern capital city. The street of many names has occupied the same place since the Greeks first established a colony in the region in the 6th century.

Representing 27 centuries of history, the neighborhood is a crowded mix of historic churches, lively piazzas, open-air cafés and one-of-a-kind shops.

3. Castel dell'Ovo

The oldest castle in Naples, the “Castle of the Egg” owes its name to the poet Virgil who supposedly placed an egg under the foundations of the fortress.

As the legend goes, the city will be protected from disaster as long as the egg remains intact. Perched on a promontory jutting into the sea, the 12th-century castle is worth visiting for the breathtaking views offered from its ramparts. The castle is also home to the Ethno-Prehistory Museum which features ceramics, earthenware and metal artifacts from the earliest days of Naples history.

4. L'Antica Pizzeria Da Michele

This pizzeria located in the historic city centre was famous long before Julia Roberts was featured munching on a slice of pizza in the movie “Eat, Pray, Love”. In business for more than a century, Da Michele has earned a reputation for making the best pizza in Italy.

5. Catacombs of San Gennaro

Dedicated to Gennaro in the 5th century when the saint’s remains were entombed there, the Catacombs of San Gennaro are actually three different cemeteries that have blended together over the years. The catacomb’s lower level includes tombs dating back to the 2nd century. Unlike other ancient underground burial sites, the catacombs feature spacious passageways with tombs that range from burial chambers for the wealthy to wall niches and floor graves for the less well-to-do.



6. Naples Cathedral

Dedicated to the city’s primary patron saint San Gennaro, the Duomo di Napoli is best known for the ceremony held within its magnificent structure three times a year. On these dates, the faithful crowd into the cathedral to see if a relic of the saint’s blood will liquify as a sign that all is well in the city. Built in the 11th and 12th century, the cathedral was later renovated using more than 100 columns salvaged from ancient Greek temples. A 4th-century church and 5th-century baptistery were incorporated into the cathedral as well.



7. Royal Palace of Naples

Representing a time when the House of Bourbon ruled Naples, the Palazzo Reale is a showpiece of pomp and power. Construction for the royal palace began in the 1600s, but most of the 30 rooms on display were completed in the 18th century when Charles III of Bourbon took up residence. Visitors climb a sumptuous marble staircase to view the court theatre, throne room, the royal bedrooms and an assortment of other chambers, all lavishly decorated with tapestries, frescoes, porcelain and portraits painted by the likes of Titian and Francesco Liani.

8. Teatro di San Carlo

The Real Teatro di San Carlo in Naples holds the title as the oldest continuously used opera house in Europe. Built by King Charles of Bourbon, the red-and-gold theatre is connected to the Royal Palace. Completed in 1737, the opera house established a standard that subsequent architects would strive to follow.



9. Sansevero Chapel

Located near the city's Archaeological Museum is one of the most unique attractions in Naples. Originally built in 1590 as a chapel for the Sansevero family, the structure was remodeled in the Baroque style in the 18th century.



10. Via San Gregorio Armeno

Located in the city's historic district, this street is the best place in Italy for "presepi," Italian nativity displays. While the Neapolitan style of presepi began in the 18th century when Charles III commissioned woodcarvers to depict the royal family, the tradition dates back to a time when the street was home to a Greek temple to Ceres, where devotees offered figurines made of clay.