

THE LONDON STANDARD



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Travel

Contorno, supplì and Trastevere: Call Me By Your Name's André Aciman does Rome



The writer lived in the Italian capital as a child and has been returning ever since. As his memoir is released, he shares his Eternal City essentials

I have returned to Rome at least once a year, usually twice, for the past 20 years, especially after the publication of my books. I have my "haunts" and these still take me back to my first year in Rome. I like evening scenes when the shops close and the Romans head home.

I still love the gleaming cobblestone as the city starts to empty a bit on streets such as Via Frattina and Via dei Condotti, which I discovered on my second or third day in Rome as an adolescent. I love that these streets are now closed to traffic so that you can amble



about in the middle and not think of cars. But I also love the city in the early afternoon, when the sun pounds the streets and the narrow lanes bask in light, emptied of people. Now that I think of it, I like Rome when fewer people are about. Then, when it's quiet, my mind wanders and I begin to think that it is my home forever.

My lasting memories of Rome are...

Ambling through, trying to fathom what Rome and I shared in common. Initially the answer was nothing at all. I was a stranger and Rome was no less strange to me. At best we'd learn to be patient with each other. I put up with its antic ways of doing things, with its strange smells, with its people, with their quick temper and impatience with my foreign accent, while it put up with my refusal to accept that I was probably going to live in its midst for the remainder of my life. Eventually, we learned to come to an understanding, which is called tolerance at first, then appeasement, and in the end, just when you least expected it, love.

There are areas I walked in the evening in the historic centre of Rome, and I mentioned them

in the memoir — late-Renaissance and baroque Rome, what I like to call My Rome. Mostly narrow streets and cobbled lanes, representing my itinerary from one bookstore to another. I fell in love with books because they screened the world of Rome that I still wasn't sure I liked, but also because books revealed another world.

If I only had 24 hours, I would...

I like Rome before the busy day starts. I'll walk to Piazza della Rotonda where the Pantheon is, then head towards Piazza di Spagna, which has always been my "centre of gravity". Then, after watching the buildings of the Keats-Shelley House, walk quietly down Via del Babuino that leads to Piazza del Popolo. In the Cerasi Chapel are two of my favourite Caravaggios, The Crucifixion of St Peter and The Conversion of St Paul.

By 11 o'clock, it's time for my unavoidable supplì (a rice and tomato snack) at Roscioli. I like to munch on supplì while walking down Via dei Giubbonari, then Via Giulia towards Trastevere, left, and cross over on the Ponte Sisto bridge, where I'm already thinking of a late lunch under the pounding noonday sun.

In the afternoon, after a short nap, I like to head to the Church of the Four Saints, where at 3pm, I want to hear the nuns sing. After that I like to head to the Basilica di San Clemente, about which I wrote in *Call Me By Your Name*.

Then it's almost cocktail hour, and I like to walk back to Piazza San Cosimato, where I'll sit and order a nice chill Campari spritz that is always accompanied by an apericena — assorted snacks of one sort or another.

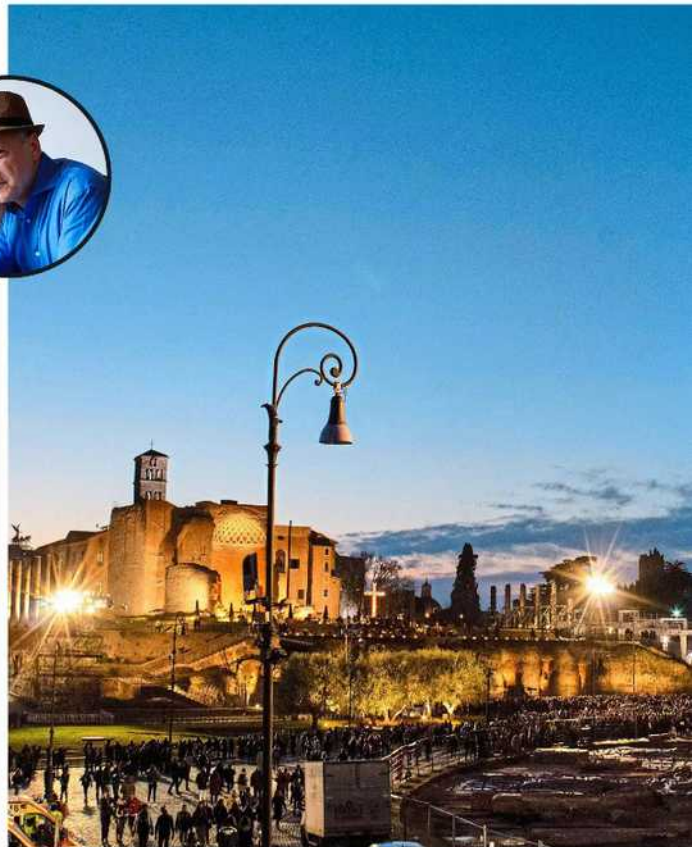
Following that I love the al fresco dinner at Trattoria Poleso or Trattoria da Luigi. I adore their rustic, simple Roman food. Then, following a stroll down Via dei Banchi Vecchi, it's time to turn in.

The chicest place to go is...

You have to see the Vatican and the Colosseum, but I prefer the area of Trastevere, because it is more Roman, rougher on the edges, sometimes roguish.

My favourite beauty spot is...

The Fontanone, right, in Trastevere with its stunning vista of all of Rome. In the film *The Great Beauty* a man simply looks out at the view of Rome and then dies.



ROMANS LIKE LEISURE, THEY KNOW HOW TO SEEK IT, HOW TO FIND AND EXPLOIT IT, AND HOW NEVER TO CUT IT SHORT



The three places you should visit for breakfast, lunch and dinner are ...

Breakfast is usually a coffee and cornetto [croissant], maybe even two coffees, though no one claims to want two. My favourite spot is by San Pancrazio, at Bar Gianicolo. It's one of the high points in the Gianicolo (in Trastevere). It's also very, very close to the American Academy in Rome and to Villa Pamphili, whose large park and stately tree area are truly lovely.

Lunch is more traditional, so I like Da Armando by the Pantheon or Dal Bolognese, on Piazza del Popolo. It offers very authentic Italian fare, thin breadsticks (grissini) while you're waiting, soup, pasta, and as a second course either meat or fish with contorno (potatoes or peas or beans, sometimes in combination). It is normally quiet, despite the clamour outside. Reservations are always a plus.

For dinner I love the crowd and the food at Zi' Umberto in Trastevere. It's normally youngish, 25- to 45-year-olds, dynamic and animated. People wait to sit outside and it's best to make a reservation. My favourite dish there is the pasta all'amatriciana, made with tomato sauce, guanciale, pecorino cheese, black pepper, olive oil, dry white wine and salt.

My packing essential for visiting Rome is ... Rome is now global. They have everything you need. Just bring your iPhone.

In what way do you wish your home city was more like Rome?

Romans like leisure, they know how to seek it,



SACRED CITY

The Temple of Venus and the Colosseum during the Way of the Cross prayer service in Holy Week

how to find and exploit it, and how never to cut it short. Work can always wait. It's not that Romans are happier than others on this planet; they just know how to delight in things and make them last.

One of the best places to stay is...

Hotel Donna Camilla Savelli (Via Garibaldi 27). It was built as a monastery for Augustinian nuns and designed by the famed architect Francesco Borromini. The hotel is very large, boasts many baroque corners and suites, and still has a small chapel. At sundown you can enjoy drinks on its rooftop with friends. It offers silent, breathtaking vistas of Rome and of all the church domes in visible succession.

A hidden gem I'm willing to share is...

Room 203 in the Hotel Donna Camilla Savelli. Once you sit in that huge terrace adjoining that room, you'll never want to leave.

The one thing I'd bring home with me as a souvenir is...

If you can find a shard of a sampietrino (a cobblestone) on the ground, take it. They're usually very heavy, but if you can find a fraction of one, if only a tiny, broken shard, it's a lovely memento of an ancient time. I once took a video of how sampietrini were being hammered down by a group of workers on Via del Babuino. A lovely sight and lovely sound of a very old custom. **As told to Hayley Spencer**

André Aciman is the author of novels including *Call Me By Your Name* and *The Gentleman From Peru*. His memoir *My Roman Year* is out now (Faber & Faber, £22)



The A-list escape

Hotel Santa Caterina, Amalfi

At Hotel Santa Caterina, lemons — hanging from trees, sitting in a bowl at reception for guests to take home, at the forefront in almost every vista — aren't just a decorative feature, but an ingredient for almost every part of your stay.

"We use lemon for everything. The pasta. The limoncello. The massages," a hotel manager tells me on a tour of the property's extensive terraced gardens and olive and lemon groves. It's a chic and peaceful sanctuary perched on the cliffs of one of Europe's busiest coasts. Next the manager points out the private suites where Bill Gates and Kim Kardashian stayed recently (not together, even though that would be a fun rumour). A-listers feature regularly here at the five-star 19th-century hotel, run by the Gambardella family since 1904. Legend has it that Elizabeth

Taylor and Richard Burton began their relationship here; Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie checked in during the early days of their romance. Some 24 hours in and it's not hard to see why the place draws such a starry set. Views of the Amalfi Coast don't get much better than at Santa Caterina, one of just a few hotels with direct access to the sea — and neither does the food. Michelin-star dining, mouthwatering breakfast pastries and Mediterranean-inspired cocktails set to live piano are among the highlights. It's just a 10-minute stroll from the centre of Amalfi (there's a free daily shuttle if you don't fancy walking). Positano, Sorrento, Capri, Pompeii and Herculaneum are all easily reached for a day trip.

The main building is an art deco villa built in "liberty" style and the interiors are a nod to the country's traditional Catholic churches — white walls, white linens, vaulted ceilings, little wooden chairs and tiled floors. The place dazzles with vintage glamour, with a timeless seaside feel and old-fashioned formality. Santa Caterina has to be one of the most stylish spots for sampling la dolce vita in the whole of Italy. Service is impeccable, but staff seem cheerful, relaxed and happy to leave you alone to listen to the live music with a nightcap.

Despite the 66 rooms (it started with six), there's still a family-run feel. Most rooms have bougainvillea-wrapped balconies, walk-in wardrobes and bathrooms with fun turquoise tiles and

Bulgari toiletries. As you would expect in Italy, the food is one of the highlights, courtesy of a foliage-filled fine dining restaurant, Glicine, which earned a Michelin star five years ago thanks to head chef Giuseppe Stanzone. Expect caviar-drenched welcome dishes. Normandy butter stamped with the hotel's logo and olive oil from Salerno. Most of the vegetables are sourced from the extensive on-site gardens.

The hotel's second restaurant, Al Mare, serves seafood and handmade pizzas cooked in a wood-fired oven. There's also La Terrazza Bar looking out over Amalfi and Il Grottino Bar carved into the rock next to the beach club.

There's a small spa featuring a sauna, sensory shower and the hotel's signature treatment, Oro di Amalfi, which uses a lemon-based oil to relax and stimulate the chakras. There are complimentary yoga sessions and a gym at the pool house overlooking the sea. But the most glittering feature is Santa Caterina's beach club, accessed by two glass-fronted elevators and featuring a sundeck with loungers, a seawater pool and ladders into the sea. Head down early to grab your spot at this magical place. **Katie Strick**

Rooms at Hotel Santa Caterina from £338.

[hotelsantacaterina.it](https://www.hotelsantacaterina.it)

EasyJet has launched the UK's only direct flights to the Amalfi Coast, with twice-weekly flights from Gatwick to the nearby Salerno Costa d'Amalfi Airport. [easyjet.com](https://www.easyjet.com)

TAKE THE PLUNGE

...and follow in the footsteps of A-list stars at Hotel Santa Caterina in Amalfi, Italy



Top Pick

Hotel Santa Caterina recently acquired a neighbouring set of properties, the **Villas della Marchesa**. It opened earlier this summer and now available to book as individual suites or an entire wing — if you're a large group of up to 14. Expect a 36-metre outdoor pool, private wine cellar and a vast landscaped garden terrace.

Country pub of the week

The Farmer's Dog, Burford

The best point of reference for Jeremy Clarkson's new Cotswolds pub, at least for London types, might be Soho Farmhouse, a 30-minute drive to the north. The Farmer's Dog is pocketed in a gentler part of the equestrian, gin-and-you-miss-it landscape: not far from Witney and Lord Cameron (east), and Burford (west), an Arts and Crafts town home to postcard cottages, Oxford Blue cheese and an



excellent curry house. What's the Farmer's Dog all about? PR, sure, but also Clarkson's keen and very real interest in fine British produce. Available are his own Hawkstone beers, pulled by him if you're lucky. And to eat, a simple menu of pub classics. It's local pork in the sausage rolls, same for the beef in the steak pie. Big dishes come with "veg of the day", a pub tradition bound to the simple nature of the countryside. The only curiosity is a lack of fish. All in all, Clarkson's attempts at a pub appear sound: wood, beer, meat and charming views, the greenery of life — and a long broadcasting career — culminating in what could well prove to be a highly popular endeavour. **Josh Barrie**
Pints from £6, [thefarmersdogpub.com](https://www.thefarmersdogpub.com)