

BRUSSELS WEEKLY

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Now, that's Italian!

Touring Rome

By Judith Works

Of all the cities I have visited I can't think of one more overwhelming than Rome. Even after ten years I never could say I saw it all, let alone gained comprehension. New sites are constantly being dug up and old ones refurbished. Sometimes it's just easier to give up and sit under a sun umbrella with a glass of prosecco.

But for the more determined traveler who is looking for some sights beyond the "must see" places I have a few suggestions. Because of Rome's long history I've divided them by eras which might make it easier to concentrate on themes of special interest and avoid suffering from Stendhal's Syndrome (although it is usually associated with Florence and its surplus of art).



Etruscan:

After the famous symbol of Rome, the bronze Capitoline Wolf - determined to be most likely a fake cast in the 11th Century with the twins a Renaissance addition - Rome

doesn't have much left from its earliest era. But what it does have is the National Museum of Etruscan Civilization in the Villa Giulia. It is filled with Etruscan-era treasures: gold jewelry, the delightful Sarcophagus of the Bride and Bridegroom, and even a life-size reproduction of a temple. If you want ruins you will have to take a day-trip to Cerveteri and Tarquinia.

Pagan Rome:

Rome is packed with remains of the Roman Empire. My favorite is the Vatican Scavi, the necropolis excavations underneath St. Peter's. The basilica was built over a Roman graveyard where upper class Romans interred their loved ones in what appear to be gorgeously frescoed rooms fronting a narrow street. The living came to commune with the departed resting in niches, holding funerary banquets in honor of the departed. Reservations are necessary and can be made through www.vatican.va/various/basiliche/necropoli/scavi_english.html. Unfortunately no children under 15.

For an excursion, the ancient port of Rome, Ostia Antica, is well worth the effort. It's nearly as good as Pompeii and much easier to get to.



Early Christianity:

The round church of San Stefano Rotondo was the first circular church in Rome and is modeled on the Holy Sepulcher. Construction began in the reign of Pope Simplicius (468-83). The interior is stark except for the ghastly Renaissance frescoes around the walls depicting inventive ways to dispatch martyrs - many by cooking methods. The last time I was there the church was decorated for a wedding - not my idea of an auspicious location. Check opening times as it is hard to visit.

Medieval:

The church of Santi Quattro Coronati. Although founded in the 500's it is most famous for its colorful medieval frescoes. And no one seems to know who the four crowned saints were.



Renaissance:

The Villa Medici, home of the French Academy, hosts art exhibitions. The Villa Borghese Pinchiana houses the Galleria Borghese. Reservations are necessary to visit the Galleria's collection of statuary and paintings. Book at www.tosc.it. The most famous Renaissance building is the Palazzo Farnese, home of the French Embassy and fabulous frescoes. Tours can be booked through www.inventerrone.com.

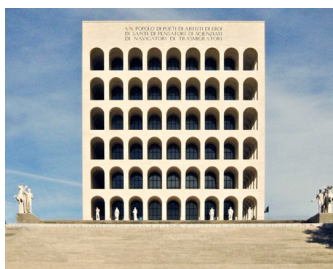
Baroque or Counter Reformation:

After Piazza Navona with Bernini's fountain of the Four Rivers and the startling statue of St. Teresa in Ecstasy in Santa Maria della Vittoria, I always want to return to two churches whose Baroque excess in the form of ceiling frescoes cause dizziness and sore necks from trying to take them all in: The Gesu and Sant Ignazio. Baroque gone wild!

If you have a taste for the ghoulish, try the Capuchin Crypt under Santa Maria della Concezione dei Cappuccini where the dismembered skeletons of 3,700 monks are tastefully arranged in decorative motifs. The Marquis de Sade liked it!

18th Century Romanticism:

The English (or Protestant) Cemetery next to a Roman-era pyramid. If you like marble drooping angels and an English gentleman reclining with a book and his dog, along with Keats and Shelly's memorials, you will love this quiet corner of Rome.



Fascist:

For stark, monumental buildings that make you feel like an insignificant cog in the machinery of state try EUR, shorthand for Esposizione Universale di Roma. Mussolini planned a gigantic world's fair to be held in 1942 in a new suburb south of the historic center. The fair was never held but the buildings remain. The most famous is the Square Coliseum, really the Palazzo della Civiltà del Lavoro, which can be seen from the road leading to the airport. The whole complex reminds me of something from Kafka and the desolate scenes painted by Giorgio De Chirico (see *The Melancholy of the Politician*).

Modern:

After years of erecting drab office buildings, Rome has discovered the big names in modern architecture. The Auditorium Parco della Musica was designed by Renzo Piano. Concerts are regularly held in the complex. Zaha Hadid designed the National Museum of 21st Century Arts (MAXXI) where con-

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EXPAT'S ANGST

By Judith Works

No doubt every expatriate has a story to tell about their arrival in the host country. Our story ended well but it got off to a rough start when we landed in Rome and could not find a place to live. My office didn't provide much help so we were on our own, two innocents abroad.

* * *

"Hey! What are you doing? STOP that!!"

I sprang up from the floor where I was lounging on a deflated air mattress and rushed into what was supposed to be our dining room in the echoing, still-empty apartment. Why was Glenn shouting? I found the answer when I saw my normally mild mannered husband hanging out the window yelling at a group of nuns in their crisp black and white habits as they dumped wheelbarrows filled with garbage onto the open space behind our building. They looked up briefly. Then, paying no further attention to the outraged foreigner, they finished their work and swished off toward an unseen convent.

It was Saturday morning. To our great surprise, I had gone to work for a branch of the United Nations a month earlier. We stayed in a hotel on the Aventine Hill for the first two weeks after our arrival in Rome and then in a new colleague's apartment for another two weeks while he was back in California. Now, at the unsettled beginning of the second month of a planned four-year stay we were tired and cranky from sleeping on the living room floor on a bed of flattened cardboard cartons that originally held an air mattress, a few dishes, pots and pans, two folding chairs, an old card table and some clothes. These items comprised our air shipment, meant to tide us over until the shipping container arrived by sea a couple of months later. The air mattress we hoped to use over the cardboard had slowly and irreparably deflated, paralleling our naïve enthusiasm for the whole adventure of a move to romantic Italy.

We had been desperate to find a home. The hotel was expensive and my settlement allowance was running out. The American Embassy located apartments for its staff, but my new office offered no assistance. The rental agents we contacted from newspaper ads had nothing satisfactory to offer, nor did the few ads on an office bulletin board. Word of mouth eventually led us to another agent, a disagreeable American who made her living finding apartments for greenhorns like us with minimum effort on her part. She insisted that we take the bus to the apartments she suggested, leaving us scrambling to find buildings in unfamiliar locations and waiting until she drove up at her leisure and parked her car on the sidewalk. Worse, after she signed us up we began to hear stories that circulated in the gossipy expatriate community that was welcoming us. One story in particular made us especially cautious about the woman: Several years before our arrival Marge invited a client for lunch at her own apartment that was filled with cats and their untended litter boxes. After a microwaved meal of *Fettuccine Alfredo*, she announced that she had an appointment and left, locking him inside. He was trapped with the cats. After waiting an hour, he managed to signal a neighbor on an adjoining balcony who reluctantly let him

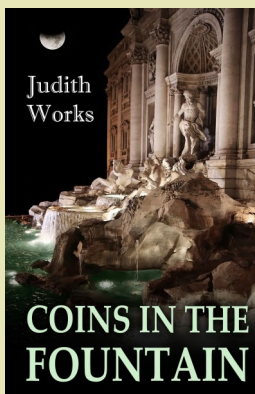
climb over the railings to escape an unknown fate.

We weren't subjected to such dramatic events but then Marge hadn't shown us anything livable either with her numerous dark and dilapidated suggestions. At the point when we were getting agitated she finally produced an attractive solution that we later heard was yet another apartment where she had resided. Our proposed new home had large windows on both long sides of one wing of a small building. It also came with a telephone, a bonus as it often took a year to have one installed at that time just before cell phones became available. Best of all, there were two balconies on one side and a sunny terrace opening off the master bedroom and living room on the other. The outdoor spaces were the real attraction for migrants from our cloudy home near Portland, Oregon.

We nodded to Marge in agreement. The next day she and the owner came to my office after work to present two contracts, both in Italian. The only part Glenn and I could read was the rental rate. The first document showed the low, legally allowable, amount. The second was for the remaining, exorbitant, amount. I signed as the breadwinner, handed over a pile of cash to our new landlord and another to our agent. After we shook hands, we were given a bunch of huge keys, the type one would expect to be used in an old monastery or castle dungeon. The place was ours. Before Marge walked off fondling her commission she offered some advice: "Always buy De Cecco pasta."

Early fall, it was still hot. I tried to focus on a remark by the ancient Roman orator Seneca: "Travel and change of place impart new vigor to the mind." Well, I always wanted to have a change of place, and now my wish came true. But sometimes mental exhaustion was a more common sensation than new vigor as my brain tried to get organized to meet the dramatic change in my life.

Our nights were spent lying awake on the floor contemplating my job, the antics of the nuns and the difficulties of getting settled. Packs of incessantly barking dogs left behind when their owners went on vacation provided a background to our thoughts. Adding to the noise, eerie sirens like those in World War II movies split the night air. We squirmed on the flat, sweaty air mattress while considering our decision-making skills – deciding to leave secure jobs for a flight into fantasy. *Mamma mia!* What had we done to ourselves?



An excerpt from *Coins in the Fountain*

The author, a graduate of Lewis & Clark law school, is now back in the Pacific Northwest after spending ten years in Italy working for the United Nations. She is the author of *Coins in the Fountain*, a memoir, and *City of Illusions*, a novel set in the expat world of Rome.

www.judithworks.net. To purchase *Coins in the Fountain*, visit <http://www.amazon.com/Coins-Fountain-Judith-Works->

[Fountain-Judith-Works-](http://www.amazon.com/Coins-Fountain-Judith-Works-)

temporary works are displayed, and Richard Meier's controversial cover for Augustus Caesar's Ara Pacis is definitely worth a visit for the interesting combination of a fine example of ancient sculpture around the altar commemorating victories in Gaul and Spain, and the glass surround.



All jumbled together:

San Clemente: The basilica was founded before 385 over the remains of earlier Roman buildings and is a continuum of artistic styles from that date until the

18th Century. It contains gorgeous Medieval mosaics but I think the most evocative part is the lowest level where you

can see a 2nd Century Mithraeum complete with a sacrificial altar depicting Mithras slitting the throat of a bull.

Centrale di Montemartini: Rome's first power station filled with "leftovers" from the Capitoline Museum. Brilliant white Roman marble statues are juxtaposed with enormous black power generating equipment dating from the early 20th Century. And there are almost no people!

So many places to see, so little time.



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Happenings In and Around the Tri-Mission

With a mission as big as ours, there is always a lot going on. To help keep you up to date we have created the Tri-Mission Calendar (TMC). The TMC will appear weekly with the latest events and activities happening in and around the Mission.

TMC for April / May 2015

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
26	27	28	29	30	1 May Day	2
3	4	5 Cinco de Mayo	6	7	8 BGT see p.8	9
10 Mother's Day	11	12	13	14 Ascension Day no BW publication	15	16 Wereth 11 Commemoration
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25 Memorial Day	26	27	28	29	30

If you have Tri-Mission related events or "happenings" you would like to share with the community, please send them to us at BrusselsWeekly@state.gov. Please be sure to tell us who is sponsoring the event.