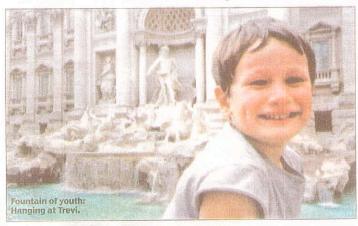
• TIGHTWAD

# Roman holiday

Go Italian - without blowing their college fund. JILL HAMBURG COPLAN shows you how



ET'S start with the basics. Any city that's passionate about pizza and gelato is inherently family-friendly, But affordable? That's another story.

Think Manhattan prices for most goods and services in Rome, and you won't be far off the mark. Which is not to say that families on a budget should desnair. Not at all.

despair. Not at all.

Travelers to Rome will find plenty of inexpensive fun to go around, adequate mid-range hotels and abundant cheap delicacies—which means it's time to introduce the kids to la dolce vita, family-style. (Prices based on 1.22 dollars to the euro.)

FREE!

Hopefully, it isn't blasphemous to just come out and say it: Churches are cheap. Rome has 900 of them, from gorgeous basilicas to soaring cathedrals, all holding art masterpieces — and most of them are free to see. This includes Michelangelo's Pietà at St. Peter's Basilica (Vatican City) and the Caravaggio in the Chiesa di Santa Maria del Popolo. Bonus: the church is designed by Raphael and completed by Bernini (Piazza del Popolo).

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Consider going to a spooky church. The Cappuccin Crypt at the Church of Santa Maria della Immacolata Concezione is home to the bones of 4,000 monks, whose skulls are used in, shall we say, "decorative" ways (Via Veneto 27).

Sir back and relax in Gianicolo Park, located on a hill above Trastevere, on the west bank of the Tiber, where you'll find astonishing views of the city. You can also people-watch on the always-buzzing Spanish Steps in the heart of Rome's historic area — or race an energetic preschooler up and down them (Piazza di Spagna).

A walk through history up

A walk through history up and down Rome's seven hills is free, too. Recommended: A visit to the gorgeous, baroque Piazza Navone, where you'll find Forno de Campo de' Fiori Bakery, famous for its rectangular pizza sold by the foot (Campo de' Fiori 22).

FUN FOR THE BAMBINI

Rent go-karts, bicycles (some built for two), rollerblades and more in the Willa Borghese, a former estate high above the urban roar and the largest public park in the city (rentals from approximately \$9). Kids can also enjoy a carousel and bumper caracter about \$1, and there's a café for snacks.

Also on the grounds is the Bioparco Giardino. Zoologico di Roma, in the northeast corner of the Borghese Gardens. It feels dumb to come to Rome and visit a zoo, but it's a nice one, kids love it, and the setting soothes after congested streets (bioparco.it).

streets (bioparco.it).

Another kid pleaser is Luna Park, which boasts roller coasters, a water flume, a flying-elephant ride and haunted houses (free admission, pay per ride; 15 minutes east of Rome; luneurit).

Explora, Il Museo del Bambini di Roma — the Children's Museum of Rome — is a hands-on environment for children up to 12. It includes an interactive, kid-size Italian nabe (hospital, grocery store, bank) and sits at the foot of the Villa Borghese Park (free/kids 3 and under, \$9 curos/ages 4 and up; closed Sun./Mon., advance booking suggested; mdbrit).

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Can't tell a Goth from a Carthaginian? Take the Time Elevator.
a 45-minute experience in a simulated time machine, where special effects will enlighten your





children and refresh your own memory on 3,000 years of Roman history (\$13/50/adults, \$11/kids; time-elevator,it).

## **GETTING AROUND**

A good map is a lifeline. One, called Roma, (\$4) is sold at most newsstands. Another, available in Rome newstands bookstores, is Rome Today. It costs more but offers greater

Two public buses offer popular get-on-get-off tours of the major monuments: ATAC (about atac.roma.it) Archeobus (about romeguide.it). The l Archeobus (about \$10; romeguide.it). The latter tours the Appian Way, the most famous road built by the ancient Romans. Both depart from the Piazza Venizia, just below the massive Vittorio Emmanuel Memorial (it looks like a wedding-cake). Private tour-bus companies, such as Stop-n-Go City Tours (romecitytours.com) and Ciao Roma (romeguide.it), offer day passes (about \$22/pp). A few dollars buys a metro or bus ride.
Or, tour the city by train.

One favorite is the #3, a slow-paced ride through various picturesque neighborhoods and neighborhoods and aqueducts, across the Tiber and through the Borghese Gardens (\$2.50). Older kids might like a walking tour. Enjoy Rome has English archaeologic

has English archaeologist guides, and you'll see the major sights in three hours (\$18/up to age 26, 21 euros age 27 and up; age 27 and enjoyrome.com).

enjoyrome.com).

Taxis aren't cheap; a speedy exit during toddler breakdowns costs at least \$10 for a 10-minute ride. Yellow or white cabs are official (check for meters); are technically illegal noters. Luggage is



## **GETTING THERE**

Alitalia (alitalia.com) and Delta (delta.com) currently offer the cheapest nonstop fares from Newark to fares from Newark to Rome's Flumicino Airport. As of press time, a roundtrip adult fare cost

approximately \$568. Shave off about \$150 for a stopover. Kids under 2 sitting on a lap can usually fly with just a ticketing charge (about \$100); older kids can sometimes get as deep as a two-thirds discount. Ask your carrier for specifics.

To get into the city from Fiumicino: Taxis run about \$61, so it's better to book with an airport minivan or limo service to your hotel. Try Rome Shuttle (\$55/pp one way; rome-shuttle.com) or Airport Shuttle (\$36/first person, \$18 each additional, one way; airportshuttle.it).

## CHEAP EATS

Neighborhood trattorias and pizzerias offer cozy settings and big portions. You won't find kids' menus. but restaurants will usually make a mezzo piatto (half-

Gelato, in hundreds of intense fruit and nut flayors, is worth a daily indulgence. We also carried snacks from home (gummy chews and cereal bars) ro

use as bribes and fuel.

Dar Pallaro offers several large courses and wine for

\$25/pp (Campo dei Fiori).
Along the blocks east and west of Piazza Navona, you'll find inexpensive,

you'll find inexpensive, quality restaurants packed almost side by side. And home-style cooking at reasonable prices can be found in the historic Jewish Ghetto nabe.

If you're across the river in Trastevere, some say Pizzeria da Baffetto is Rome's best. Feed four for approximately \$37; it doesn't get much better than that (Via Governo Vecchio II4).

And Da Gildo has multi-

And **Da Gildo** has multi-course meals for about \$31/pp (Via della Scala 31a).

For more free stuff, visit toursofrome.com/tourist /cityguide/rome.for.free.

# **SWEET DREAMS** 6 cheap sleeps

1. Sant'Anna, near the Vatican, is a gorgeous "three-star" in a 16th-century building (from \$175/night; [39] 06-688-01602, hotelsantanna.com). 2. Hotel Julia, near the Spanish Steps, has an elegant façade, clean, minimalist rooms and a low-

key feel (from \$154 for a "junior" suite; [39] 06-488-1637, hoteljulia.it). 3. Hotel Madrid, also near the Spanish Steps, offers great views from the roof terrace and nice if generic rooms (from \$150/double, [39] 06-699-1511, hotelmadridroma.com). 4. For a funkier vibe (i.e., vintage-modern furniture and an on-site gallery), consider The Bee-Hive

(from \$95/double, no private bath; [39] 06-447-04553, the-beehive.com). 5. Albergo del Sole, near Piazza Navona, is a 600-yearold, restored landmark with patios (from \$110; [39] 06-687-9446, solealbiscione.it). 6. Also try an Italian B&B association, such as romaturismo.it, bbitalia.it and b-b.rm.it. Book with care if it's a family home.