

Alternative Attractions You Need to See in Rome



Once the governing seat of the most famous and revered empire in the history of our planet, they say that all roads lead to Rome. Its status as a world city is legendary, having been in existence for an astonishing 28 centuries, making it one of the oldest continuously populated regions in Europe. As a tourist attraction, Rome needs little introduction, with the entire city center under the UNESCO umbrella as a World Heritage Site. The likes of the Colosseum, the Trevi Fountain, the Pantheon, St Peter's Basilica and, of course, the treasures of the Vatican City attract millions of visitors every year. But there's more to Rome than just these usual suspects.

While the big attractions are more than enough to keep most holidaymakers happy, what about the off-the-beaten-track sights you might not have heard of? If you're keen to lose the crowds and dig a little deeper, you'll discover that in a city that has seen as much as these old stones, you'll be richly rewarded with the alternative attractions you need to see in Rome.

Pyramid of Cestius

You might not have expected to find a 2000-year-old pyramid in the center of Rome. Dating back to 18 BC, it was built as a tomb to one Gaius Cestius, a member of an ancient religious corporation in the city. It was discovered to contain the remnants of frescos when it was opened in 1660, but little else survives. It is the only “Egyptian” pyramid in Europe and members of the public can only enter on certain days of the month while arranging a visit in advance. Romantic poets John Keats and Percy Shelley are buried in the cemetery close by too.



Torre Argentina Cat Sanctuary

Home to around 130 felines, this is about as unusual as you can get when it comes to alternative attractions. And not only that, but this was the spot on which a certain Julius Caesar met his untimely end. Rome’s famous street cats have since taken over and made the sunken ruins of four different temples their home, and the shelter close by takes good care of them. You can even adopt one if you’re that way inclined.

The Doll Hospital

For something a little creepy and not for those of a nervous disposition, try a visit to the doll hospital. It’s a blink-and-you’ll-miss-it shop front near the Piazza del Popolo, but the contents of the window will chill

your very bones and amaze in equal measure. The family who owns the tiny store took it upon themselves to repair "sick" dolls, so you'll see all manner of disembodied heads and limbs all patiently waiting for a new lease of life. There's a reason locals here call it "the little shop of horrors."



Galleria Sciarra

While thousands of tourists jostle for a picture at the Trevi Fountain, you should leave the madness to discover a real hidden gem close by. The Galleria Sciarra is a decadent 19th-century courtyard painted by Giuseppe Cellini and a beautiful example of the Art Nouveau movement, with colorful frescoes adorning the walls reaching up four stories. It was originally intended as a shopping mall, but now is one of Rome's best-kept secrets and many people don't know it even exists. It's open to the public until 8 pm and just as lovely when viewed at night as it is during the day.



Roman Gladiator School

If you're holidaying with the kids then this attraction will be a sure-fire hit. An exact replica of a Roman military encampment, here you can learn everything you'll need in order to survive a death-match in the Colosseum. There's a program of events, a variety of classes and lectures to attend as well as knowledgeable and appropriately attired staff dressed in the fashions of the day. There's also a museum dedicated to all things gladiatorial to learn more about this fascinating and bloody sport.

Street Art Tour

In a city most famous for its ancient art and architecture, sometimes the more modern work will be overlooked. Whether you see street art in a positive or negative light, there's no denying Rome has some incredibly bright neighborhoods adorned with the tags of some seriously talented artists. Explore the likes of Quadraro, Ostiense, and San Lorenzo to get you started – and the latter is a vibrant, trendy but cheap hang out for the younger crowd.



The Mouth of Truth

Located at the Santa Maria in Cosmedin church, this unusual curiosity is another great attraction to take the kids to. It's an enormous marble mask that is said to depict the face of the Roman sea god Oceanus. Legend has it that if you put your hand in the mouth and you're a less-than-truthful individual, it will bite

it off. Movie fans will recognize it from a scene in the Audrey Hepburn and Gregory Peck classic *Roman Holiday*. Be aware though, it now costs money to take an amusing picture with the mask – apparently to raise money to repair the church next door.

These intriguing attractions have barely scratched the surface when it comes to the alternative delights you can discover in the Eternal City, and you're never going to be too far from the weird and wonderful in Rome.