

Italy

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Rome** Italy's capital is a seething cauldron of history and modern mayhem (p632)
- **Cinque Terre** Olive-clad cliffs plunge into the sparkling Med on Liguria's coastline (p649)
- **Verona** Play Romeo and Juliet in the town whose bloody past inspired Shakespeare (p655)
- **Syracuse** Brush up on your classics at Syracuse's ancient Greek temple (p695)
- **Best journey** Head south from Naples (p682) by way of Pompeii (p686) to the Amalfi Coast (p688); from Sorrento (p688) pop over to posh Capri (p687)
- **Off-the-beaten track** Explore Matera's *sassi* (p689), setting for Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ*

FAST FACTS

- **Area** 301,230 sq km (around half the size of Ukraine)
- **ATMs** Widespread
- **Budget** €50-100 per day
- **Capital** Rome
- **Country code** ☎ 39, international access code ☎ 00
- **Famous for** food & wine, Roman ruins, Renaissance art, dodgy driving
- **Head of State** President Giorgio Napolitano
- **Language** Italian
- **Money** euro (€); A\$1 = €0.60, CA\$1 = €0.68, ¥100 = €0.66, NZ\$1 = €0.51, UK£1 = €1.47, US\$1 = €0.78
- **Phrases** *buongiorno* (hello), *grazie* (thanks), *mi scusi* (excuse me), *quanto costa?* (how much is it?), *sta scherzando!* (you're joking)



- **Population** 58.5 million
- **Time** GMT/UTC + 1
- **Visas** EU citizens don't need a visa to enter Italy. Nationals of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA don't need a visa for stays of up to 90 days. A *permesso di soggiorno* (permit to stay) is necessary to work, study or live in Italy.

TRAVEL HINTS

Save money by drinking wine not beer; save plastic by filling empty bottles at drinking fountains. Pack a smart set of clothes.

ROAMING ITALY

Visit Rome, then Tuscany – Florence, Pisa and Siena are the biggies. With more time, visit Naples and the Amalfi Coast.

Known to Italians as *il Bel Paese* (the Beautiful Country), Italy hits the senses hard. It's impossibly beautiful one minute and comically chaotic the next; it's colourful, noisy and highly theatrical. The food is superb and its passion utterly disarming.

It's also a nation with a lot to live up to. Many of its sights seem so familiar that the risk of disappointed expectations is a real one. Fortunately, though, no photo can portray the thrill of

exploring the Colosseum in Rome or seeing Michelangelo's *David* in Florence. The atmosphere of Venice's canals or Verona's romantic lanes can never be felt on film.

Away from the cities, Italy provides a wealth of outdoor opportunities. You can walk the Amalfi Coast, ski in the Dolomites or simply soak up the sun on Sicily and Sardinia's golden beaches.

But there's more to Italy than the obvious. To list every Umbrian hill town and to review every cool trattoria in Tuscany would require a tome heavier than the average backpack. The art to visiting Italy is to get out there and discover it for yourself – sooner or later you'll find a corner you can call your own.

HISTORY

Pre-dating the Romans, the Etruscans were the first major force to emerge on the Italian peninsula. By the 7th century BC they dominated central Italy, rivalled only by the Greeks of Magna Graecia in the south. Both groups thrived until the 3rd century BC when Rome's rampaging legionnaires crashed in.

Founded in 753 BC – possibly by Romulus, possibly not – Rome became a republic in 509 BC. Expansion followed and by the turn of the millennium it ruled much of Western Europe and the Mediterranean. After Caesar's death in 44 BC, his great-nephew Octavian defeated his rivals Mark Antony and Cleopatra, establishing the Roman Empire in 27 BC and adopting the title of Augustus Caesar.

The empire's golden age came in the 2nd century AD but a century later it was in decline. Emperor Constantine heralded in Christianity, and in AD 330 founded Constantinople in Byzantium. Rome and its Western Empire fell to the Germanic barbarians in 476.

The Middle Ages witnessed the development of Italy's powerful city-states of which Florence made the biggest impact, giving rise to the 15th-century Renaissance.

By the early 16th century much of Italy was in foreign hands – the Austrian Habsburgs in the north and the Spanish Bourbons in the south. Not much changed until the mid-19th century when the Risorgimento (unification movement) culminated in the 1861 declaration of the Kingdom of Italy under King Vittorio Emanuele.

Italy's brief fascist interlude was a low point in the nation's history. Mussolini gained power in 1925 and in 1940 entered Italy into WWII on Germany's side. Defeat ensued and he was killed by partisans in April 1945.

Italy's postwar era has been largely successful. A founding member of the European Economic Community, it survived a period of domestic terrorism in the 1970s and enjoyed sustained economic growth until the

1980s. The 1990s heralded a period of crisis as national bribery scandals rocked the nation, paving the way for Silvio Berlusconi's entry into politics. After a short period as PM in 1994, the billionaire media-magnate took the reins again in 2001, going on to become Italy's longest serving postwar PM. The party came to an end in April 2006 when, after a knife-edge vote, Romano Prodi's centre-left coalition won Italy's general election.

THE CULTURE

It's not difficult to stereotype the Italians as volatile, charming, stylish and enviably uninhibited. And, to an extent, they are all these things. They're also pretty conformist – maintaining *la bella figura* ('face') is all important to many Italians – and they are fiercely protective of their region, a phenomenon known as *campanilismo* (literally, an attachment to the local bell tower).

Family ties are important. It's not unusual to find three generations living together and even if times are changing, 67.9% of single Italian men still stay at home until they marry.

SPORT

Football rules in Italy. Turin's Juventus and Milan's AC and Inter teams dominate the domestic game and often do well in Europe. In 2006, the sport was rocked by a corruption scandal that resulted in Juve being relegated to Serie B and other teams having points deducted for the 2006 season. However, the country's World Cup triumph helped to ease the anguish of the affected clubs' supporters.

Motor sports are also fanatically supported. Ferrari's Michael Schumacher has won many Formula One Grands Prix while Valentino Rossi remains the star of the MotoGP World Championship. The Italian Grand Prix is held at Monza in September and the San Marino Grand Prix at Imola in April/May.



RELIGION

The role of religion in modern Italian life is as much about form as faith – 84% of Italians consider themselves Catholic yet only 34% attend church regularly. Still, first Communion, church weddings and regular feast days remain an integral part of life.

There are about 1.3 million Muslims in Italy (making Islam the nation's second religion), about 400,000 evangelical Protestants, 350,000 Jehovah's Witnesses and smaller numbers of Jews and Buddhists.

ARTS Literature

Italy's literary past ranges from Virgil's (70–19 BC) *Aeneid* to the anguished war stories of Primo Levi (1919–87) and Italo Calvino's (1923–85) fantastical tales.

Dante (1265–1321), whose *Divina Commedia* (Divine Comedy) dates from the early 1300s, was one of three 14th-century greats; the others being Petrarch (1304–74) and Giovanni Boccaccio (1313–75), who is considered to be the first Italian novelist. Just over a century later Machiavelli (1469–1527) established his name with the political classic, *The Prince*.

In recent times Sicily has produced a number of top authors. Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa (1896–1957) brilliantly depicts the island's wary mentality in *Il Gattopardo* (The Leopard), a theme that Leonardo Sciascia (1921–89) later returns to. Andrea Camilleri (b 1925) writes in a lighter vein – his Montalbano whodunnits are popular examples.

Music

Opera has always appealed to the Italians. Verdi (1813–1901) might be the most famous composer, but Puccini (1858–1924), Bellini (1801–35), Donizetti (1797–1848) and Rossini (1792–1868) are hardly unknowns. Tenor Luciano Pavarotti (b 1935) enjoyed critical acclaim during his singing career while blind Andrea Bocelli (b 1958) continues to sell CDs by the box load.

But it's not all opera. Antonio Vivaldi (1675–1741) created the concerto in its present form and wrote *Le Quattro Stagioni* (The Four Seasons).

On the modern scene, Naples dub and techno outfit Almamegretta have achieved international success.

READING UP

Bone up with the *Concise History of Italy* by Vincent Cronin, and Giuseppe Tomasi di Lampedusa's Sicilian classic, *The Leopard*. Mafia junkies can get their fill in Peter Robb's *Midnight in Sicily*.

A fierce critique of Berlusconi's Italy, Tobias Jones' *The Dark Heart of Italy* caused controversy when it was published in 2003. On a lighter note, George Negus' *The World from Italy: Football, Food and Politics* makes excellent train reading.

Architecture, Painting & Sculpture

Ancient ruins, Renaissance *palazzi* and baroque churches all stand testament to the central role that the arts have played in Italy's past.

Europe's most famous artistic movement, the Renaissance, took off in 15th-century Italy. Under the Medici in Florence and the Roman papacy, Leonardo da Vinci (1452–1519), Michelangelo Buonarroti (1475–1564) and Raphael (1483–1520) set new standards of artistic expression.

Controversial and highly influential, Michelangelo Merisi da Caravaggio (1573–1610) dominated the late 16th century. His realism contrasted with the exuberant style of baroque rivals Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) and Francesco Borromini (1599–1667).

Signalling a return to classical sobriety, neoclassicism was the rage in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, producing sculptor Canova (1757–1822).

Of Italy's modern artists, Amedeo Modigliani (1884–1920) is the most famous. The early 20th century also produced the futurists, who rejected the sentimental art of the past and the *razionalisti* (rationalists), whose architectural vision found form in Rome's EUR district.

ENVIRONMENT

Bound by the Adriatic, Ligurian, Tyrrhenian and Ionian seas, Italy has more than 8000km of coastline. Inland, about 75% of the peninsula is mountainous – the Alps curve 966km round the country's northern border while the Apennines extend 1350km from north to south.

Italy has 21 national parks, covering about 5% of the country, and over 400 nature reserves, natural parks and wetlands. It also

EMERGENCY NUMBERS

- Ambulance ☎ 118
- Carabinieri/police ☎ 112/113
- Fire ☎ 115
- Roadside assistance ☎ 116

boasts 40 World Heritage sites, more than any other country.

Of Italy's environmental challenges, air pollution is the most obvious. A feature of many city centres, it's largely caused by car emissions. Traffic restrictions are helping but still a lot needs to be done.

In the countryside, tree clearing and illegal building has led the WWF to claim that a third of Italy's coastline is threatened by erosion. There are also natural hazards: landslides, floods, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions.

FOOD & DRINK

Italian cuisine is an amalgam of regional traditions. Local specialities abound – such as *pesto* in Liguria, pizza in Naples and *ragù* (bolognese sauce) in Bologna. It's the same with wine: Piedmont produces Italy's great reds – Barolo, Barbaresco and Dolcetto – while Tuscany's famous for Chianti, Brunello and white Vernaccia. Peroni is the national beer.

As a rule it pays to eat local food prepared with seasonal produce. Vegetarians will find delicious fruit and veg in the hundreds of daily markets.

A full Italian meal consists of an antipasto, a *primo piatto* (first course), *secondo piatto* (second course) with an *insalata* (salad) or *contorno* (vegetable side dish),

and finally the *dolci* (sweet). When eating out it's perfectly acceptable to order, say, a *primo* followed by an *insalata* or *contorno*.

TRANSPORT**GETTING THERE & AWAY****Air**

The increasing number of low-cost carriers means you should be able to find a decent fare into Italy, particularly if flying from another European country. No-frills airlines include: **Air Berlin** (code AB; ☎ 848 39 00 54; www.airberlin.com) **EasyJet** (code U2; ☎ 848 88 77 66; www.easyjet.com) **Hapag-Lloyd Express** (X3; ☎ 199 192 692; www.hlx.com) **Jet2** (code LS; ☎ 0044 207 170 07 37; www.jet2.com) **Ryanair** (code FR; ☎ 889 67 89 10; www.ryanair.com) **Virgin Express** (code TV; ☎ 800 097 097; www.virgin-express.com)

The national airline is **Alitalia** (code AZ; ☎ 06 22 22; www.alitalia.it); domestic airlines are **Air One** (☎ 199 207 080; www.flyairone.it), **Meridiana** (☎ 199 111 333; www.meridiana.it) and **Volareweb** (☎ 199 414 500; www.buyvolareweb.com).

Italy's main intercontinental airport is Rome's **Leonardo da Vinci** (code FCO; www.adr.it), but regular intercontinental flights also serve Milan's **Malpensa** (code MXP; www.sea-aerportomilano.it).

Boat

Ferries connect Italy to Spain, Croatia, Greece, Turkey, Tunisia, Albania, Malta and Corsica; for a comprehensive list log onto **Traghettonline** (www.traghettonline.net).

For further details see Ancona (p681), Brindisi (p690), Genoa (p649), Sicily (p691) and Venice (p665).

EAT IN THE CULINARY UNDERWORLD

Secret locations and text messages to bring your own gear – but it's not what you're thinking. Italy's latest underground movement is not about dance and dope, it's about food. Across the country illegal eateries have been springing up to serve cost-conscious diners.

Born in response to post-euro price hikes, these *fai da te* (Do It Yourself) *trattorie* typically serve a three-course meal for as little as €15. Some insist that punters bring their own ingredients and most allow diners to enjoy a post-meal fag, something draconian smoking laws have outlawed in regular restaurants.

You're unlikely to find one of these places on your own – they're often in abandoned farmhouses or even private homes – but make some local friends and you never know, you might get lucky.

Bus

European coach consortium **Eurolines** (www.eurolines.com) operates buses to Turin, Milan, Rome and Florence. **Busabout** (☎ 020 7950 1661; www.busabout.com) runs to Rome, Florence, Siena, Pisa, Ancona, Venice and La Spezia, as well as 60 other European cities. It offers passes of varying duration, allowing you to use its hop-on hop-off service.

Train

Trains depart from Rome, Milan, Naples, Turin and Venice for international destinations including Nice, Paris, Munich, Barcelona, Zurich and Vienna. You can book tickets at train stations and most travel agencies. On overnight hauls a couchette costs about €25, which is not much more than a hostel bed.

For the latest fare information contact the **Rail Europe Travel Centre** (☎ 0870 848 848; www.raileurope.co.uk).

See the Transport chapter for details of Eurail (p1213) and Inter-Rail (p1214), both of which are valid in Italy.

GETTING AROUND**Bicycle**

Bikes are available for rent in many Italian towns (from about €10 a day). They can be taken on any train carrying the bike logo on payment of a supplement (€3.50 or €5 for Eurostars). Bikes travel free on ferries.

Boat

Navi (large ferries) service Sicily and Sardinia; **traghetti** (smaller ferries) and **aliscafi** (hydrofoils) sail to Elba, the Aeolian Islands, Capri and Ischia. The main embarkation points for Sardinia are Genoa, Livorno, Civitavecchia and Naples; for Sicily, Naples and Villa San Giovanni in Calabria. **Tirrenia Navigazione** (☎ 800 82 40 79; www.tirrenia.it) services most Italian ports.

Bus

Italy boasts an extensive and reliable bus network. Buses are not necessarily cheaper than trains but in mountainous areas such as Umbria, Sicily and Sardinia they're often the only choice. Reservations are only necessary for long-haul trips.

Major companies include **Marozzi** (www.marozzi.it, in Italian) and **Interbus** (☎ 0935 56 51 11; www.interbus.it, in Italian).

Car & Motorcycle

Roads are generally good and there's an excellent system of toll *autostrade* (motorways). Petrol prices are high.

Many cities have introduced restricted motor vehicle access to their historical centres. The restrictions, however, do not apply to foreign-registered vehicles, mopeds or scooters.

All EU driving licences are recognised in Italy. Holders of non-EU licences need an International Driving Permit (IDP) to accompany their national licence.

To hire a car you must be aged 21 or over, possess a valid driving licence and have a credit card (without one you'll have to leave a large cash deposit).

If you're driving your own car, carry proof of ownership and an international insurance certificate, known as a *Carta Verde* (Green Card), which is available from your insurance company.

Wearing a helmet is compulsory on all two-wheeled vehicles.

Train

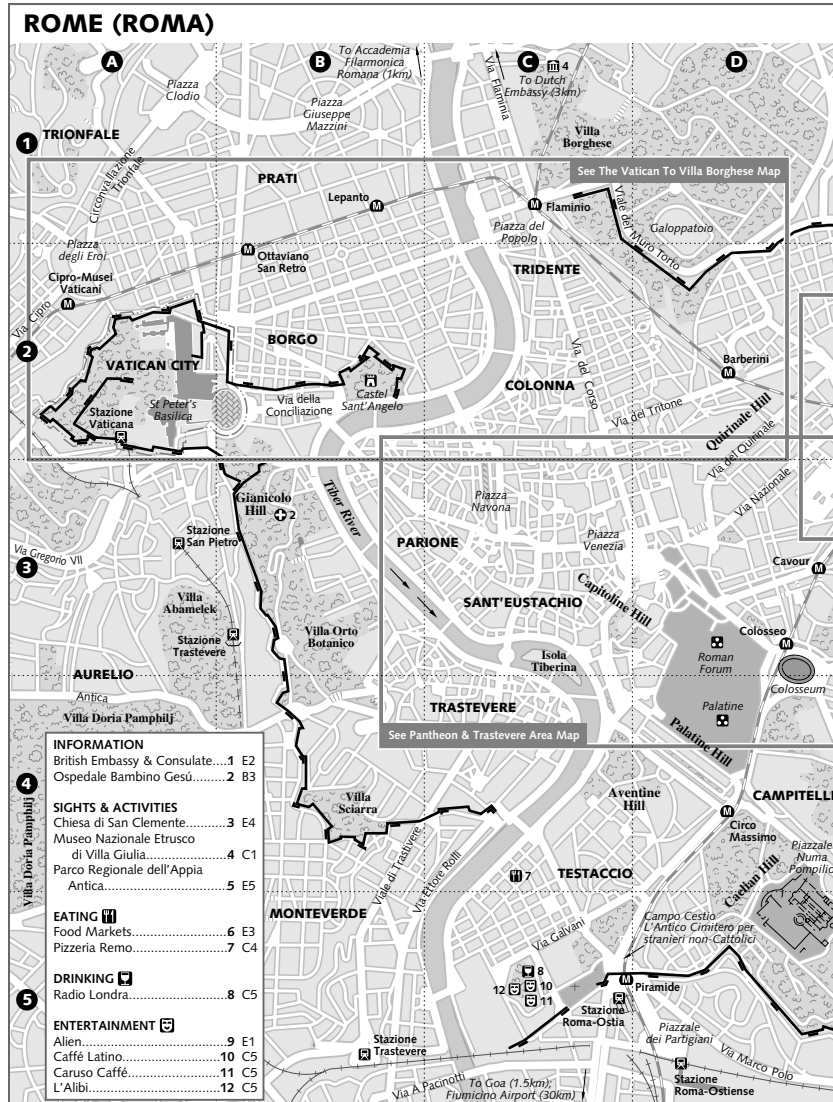
The partially privatised **Trenitalia** (☎ 89 20 21; www.trenitalia.com) runs most trains in Italy. There are several types: local *regionale* or *interregionale*; faster InterCity (IC), and, quickest of all, Eurostar (ES).

Ticket prices depend on the type of train and class (1st class costs almost double 2nd class). Regional trains are cheaper than Inter-city and Eurostar services, both of which require a supplement determined by the distance travelled. Eurostar ticket prices also include a compulsory reservation fee. It's cheaper to buy all local train tickets in Italy.

Tickets must be validated – in the yellow machines at the entrance to platforms – before boarding trains.

The Trenitalia Pass, available at all major train stations, allows for four to 10 days' travel within a two-month period. Four-/10-day youth passes (for 12 to 26 year olds) cost €132/222.

The Greece'n'Italy Pass entitles holders to travel on trains in Italy and Greece for four to 10 days within a two-month period. It also includes a return ticket on any Superfast or Blue Star ferry between Ancona/Brindisi and Greece. Four-/10-day youth passes cost €167/269.

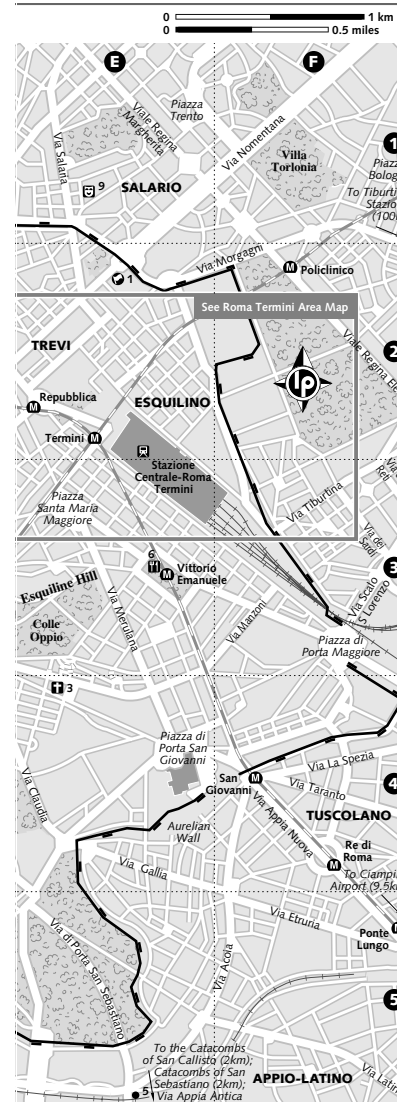


ROME (ROMA)

pop 2.5 million

Rome: just the name conjures 2700 years of Western civilisation. Possibly the most influential city the world has ever seen, Rome might now be filled with more foreigners

carrying maps of Rome than actual Roman citizens. However, its storied past and legendary buildings overpower and captivate even the most jaded of visitors. From the iconic Colosseum to the medieval winding streets of Trastevere, practically every centimetre of Rome is saturated in history or is artistically inspired, or both. It is at the same



time traditional and avant-garde, chaotic and fashionable.

Italy's capital is a thriving metropolis and the seat of many an international organisation but, unlike many large cities, with nary a skyscraper in sight. Its moniker, the *Città Eterna* (Eternal City), speaks as much to its future as its past.

ORIENTATION

Rome is surprisingly small, especially the *centro storico* (historic centre). Most intercity trains stop at Roma Termini (sometimes called Stazione Termini). *Urbano* (city) buses leave from just in front, in the Piazza del Cinquecento, and Metro Linea A and B depart from under the train station.

INFORMATION

Emergency

Foreigners' Bureau (Map p634; ☎ 06 468 62 977; Via Genova 2) Report thefts here.

Police station (Questura; Map p634; ☎ 06 468 61; Via San Vitale 11; ☎ 24hr)

Internet Access

Easy Internet Café (Map pp636-7; Via Barberini 2; per hr €2; ☎ 8am-1am) Over 100 terminals on two floors.

Telephone Center International (Map p634; Via Volturino 52; per hr/30min €2/1) Also good rates on international phone calls.

Medical Services

In each pharmacy (*farmacia*) window is a list of all-night pharmacies, or call ☎ 06 22 89 41.

24-hour Pharmacy (Map p634; ☎ 06 488 00 19; Piazza del Cinquecento 49/50/51) Opposite Roma Termini.

Ospedale Bambino Gesù (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 685 92 351; Piazza di Sant'Onofrio 4) Rome's paediatric hospital.

Ospedale San Gallicano (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 588 23 90; Via di San Gallicano 25a, Trastevere)

Money

American Express (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 676 41; Piazza di Spagna 38)

Thomas Cook (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 482 81 82; Piazza Barberini 21)

Post

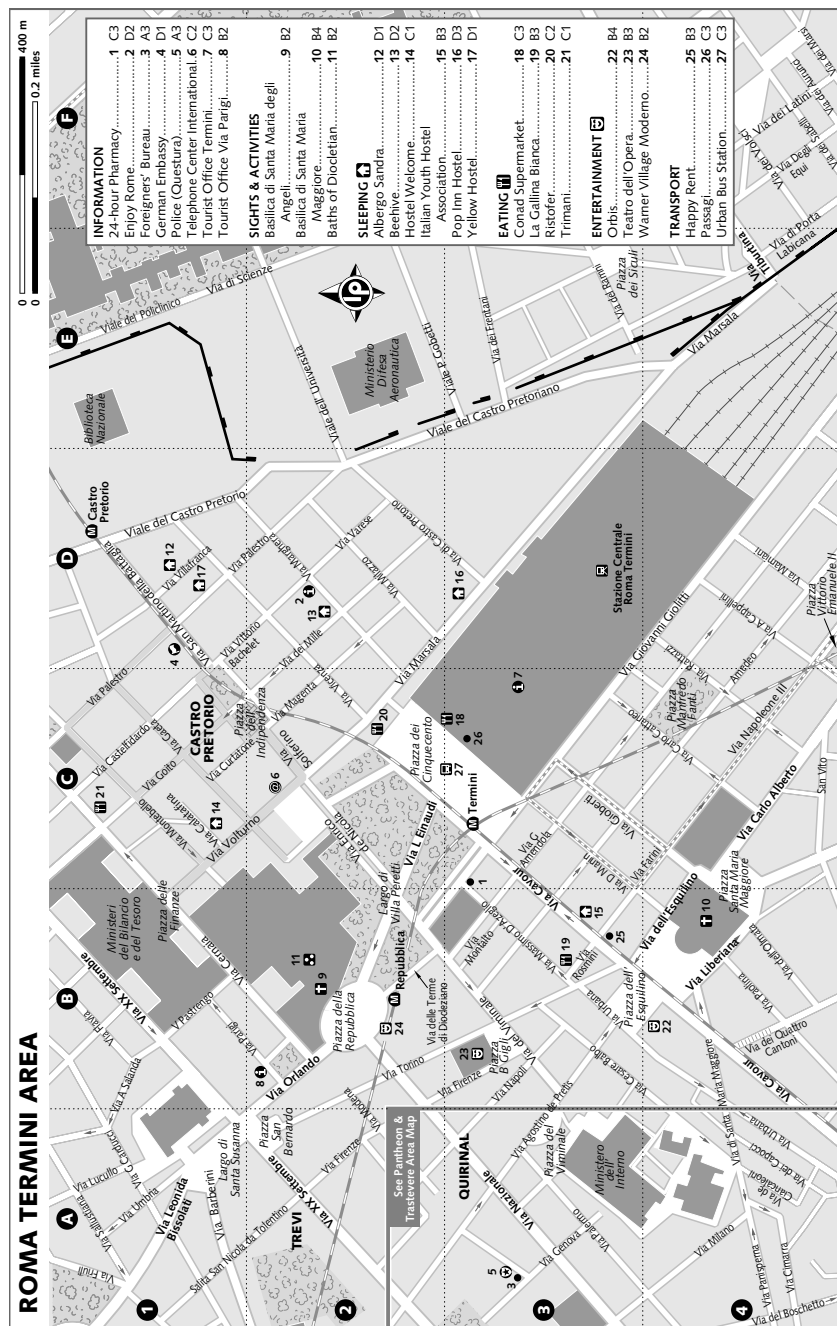
Main post office (Map pp636-7; Piazza di San Silvestro 19; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1pm Sat)

Tourist Information

Enjoy Rome (Map p634; ☎ 06 445 18 43; www.enjoyrome.com; Via Marghera 8a; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) Information on Rome activities, hotels and nightlife, and nearby trips.

Tourist information line (☎ 06 8205 9127; ☎ 9am-7pm daily)

Tourist offices Roma Termini (Map p634; ☎ 06 48 90 63 00; ☎ 8am-9pm); Via Parigi 5 (Map p634; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) Good information on hotels and sights. Both offices provide maps and printed information about bus services.



SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

When it comes to seeing the sights, that old adage *Roma, non basta una vita* (Rome, a lifetime is not enough) couldn't be more true. Possibly the only European capital with more ruins than dog poop, Rome boasts thousands of years of visible history.

Entry to various attractions is free for EU citizens aged under 18 and over 65, and reduced (usually half price) for EU citizens aged between 18 and 25, plus those from countries with reciprocal arrangements and many university students.

Colosseum

It takes a bit of imagination, but when visiting Rome's greatest known monument, the **Colosseum** (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 399 67 700; admission incl Palatine Hill €10; 🕒 9am-1hr before sunset), try to close your eyes and picture how the ancient arena would have appeared in its heyday – the marble-covered building crammed with 50,000 spectators, complete with boxed seats (some with the benefactor's carved names still visible), toilet facilities, refreshment stands and a giant retractable sail to act as a roof. Instead of football, however, they would have been watching gladiators fight panthers, hippopotami and crocodiles, and, occasionally, one another. The Colosseum was built by Emperor Vespasian in 72 AD and finished by his son Titus in 80 AD.

On the western side of the Colosseum is the **Arch of Constantine**, built to honour Constantine's victory over his rival Maxentius at the battle of Milvian Bridge in AD 312. Its decorative reliefs were taken from earlier structures.

Roman Forum & Palatine Hill

Visit the dawn of Western civilisation at the **Roman Forum** (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 399 67 700; admission free to Forum, admission to Palatine Hill incl Colosseum €10; 🕒 9am-1hr before sunset Mon-Sat), set in a valley between the Capitoline and Palatine hills. Throughout the era of the kings, the Republic and the Empire, the Forum was the political, religious and social centre of the Roman world.

As you enter at Largo Romolo e Remo (coming from the Colosseum and Via dei Fori Imperiali), to your left is the **Tempio di Antonino e Faustina**, erected by the Senate in AD 141 and transformed into a church in the 8th century. To your right are the remains

of the **Basilica Aemilia**, built in 179 BC. The **Via Sacra**, which traverses the Forum from northwest to southeast, runs in front of the basilica.

Towards the Campidoglio is the **Curia**, once the meeting place of the Roman Senate and converted into a church. In front of the Curia is the **Lapis Niger**, a large piece of black marble that purportedly covered the grave of Romulus.

The **Arco di Settimo Severo** was erected in AD 203 in honour of this emperor and his sons, and is considered one of Italy's major triumphal arches. A circular base stone beside the arch marks the *umbilicus urbis*, the symbolic centre of ancient Rome.

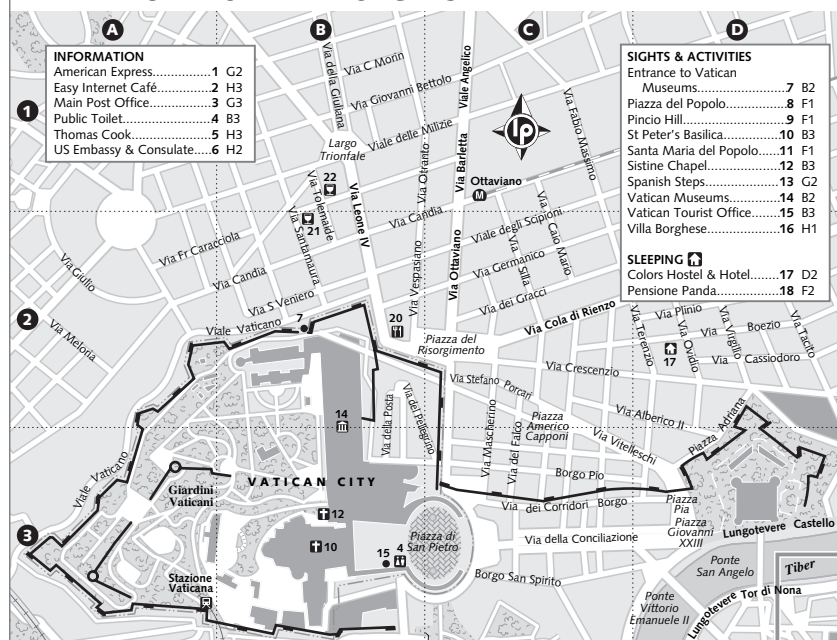
Southwest of the arch is the **Tempio di Saturno**, one of the most important ancient Roman temples. Dedicated in 497 BC to the god of chaos and disorder, it was later used as the state treasury. The **Basilica Giulia**, in front of the temple, was the seat of justice, and nearby is the **Tempio di Giulio Cesare**, erected by Augustus in 29 BC on the site where Caesar's body was burned.

In the area southeast of the temple is the **Chiesa di Santa Maria Antiqua**, the oldest Christian church in the Forum, now closed to the public. Back on Via Sacra is the **Casa delle Vestali**, home of the virgins who tended the eternal flame of Rome in the adjoining **Tempio di Vesta**. The vestal virgins were chosen at the age of 10 for their beauty and virtue. They were required to stay chaste and committed to keeping the flame for 30 years, when they could retire at the age of 40. The **Arco di Tito**, at the Colosseum end of the Forum, was built in AD 81 in honour of the victories of the emperors Titus and Vespasian against Jerusalem.

From here, climb the **Palatine** (admission incl Colosseum €10; entrances along Via di San Gregorio & Piazza dei Santa Maria Nova), where wealthy Romans built their homes and legend says that Romulus founded the city. You'll find the former villas of Emperor Domitian at **Domus Augustana** and **Domus Flavia**, where the modern-thinking emperor built his very own home entertainment system – a complete indoor sports stadium.

Also of note on the Palatine Hill are the **Tempio della Magna Mater**, built in 204 BC, and the fresco-adorned **Casa di Livia**, where the Emperor Augustus' wife schemed her way into history.

THE VATICAN TO VILLA BORGHESE



Vatican City

pop 900

The smallest sovereign nation in the world, Vatican City comprises just 1 sq km on the western bank of the Tiber, but houses the most important Catholic collection in the world. The Vatican has considerable influence, with its own postal service, currency, newspaper, radio station and even an army of Swiss Guards to watch over the pope's personal safety. There's a **Vatican tourist office** (☎ 06 698 81 662; Piazza di San Pietro; 🕒 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat) just to the west of the Basilica.

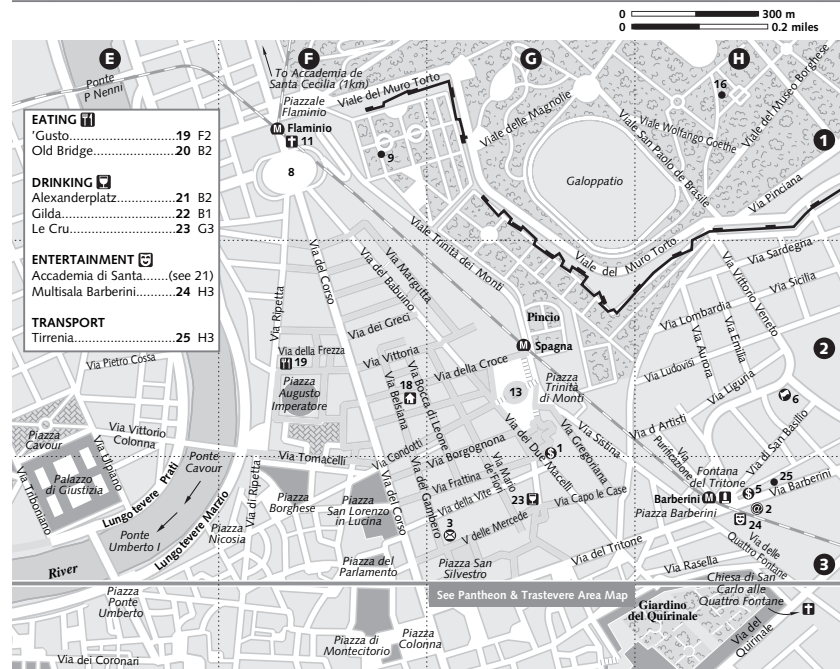
ST PETER'S BASILICA & SQUARE

The glorious **St Peter's Basilica** (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 69 88 20 19; Piazza di San Pietro; admission free; 🕒 7am-7pm Apr-Sep, to 6pm Oct-Mar) is testament to the religious, artistic and cultural significance of Rome. There has been a church here since Constantine's reign during the 4th century, marking the legendary spot where St Peter was buried. Michelangelo was responsible for the design of the grand dome, which soars 120m above the altar and was completed in 1590, long after the genius artist and architect had

died. The cavernous interior contains numerous treasures, including Michelangelo's superb *Pietà*, sculpted when he was only 24 years old and the only work to carry his signature.

Enter the Basilica through Piazza di San Pietro, four rows of colonnades designed by Bernini. Pilgrims, nuns and tourists congregate here in long lines. Entrance to the dome is to the right as you climb the stairs to the basilica's atrium. Make the climb on foot (€4) or by lift (€7). Dress rules and security are stringently enforced: no shorts, miniskirts or sleeveless tops, and bags will be searched.

Equally impressive is Bernini's masterpiece **Piazza di San Pietro**, laid out in the 17th century. The vast piazza is bound by two semicircular colonnades, each comprising four rows of Doric columns, and in its centre stands an obelisk brought to Rome by Caligula from Heliopolis (in ancient Egypt). The pope usually gives a **public audience** at 10am every Wednesday in the Papal Audience Hall or St Peter's Square. You must make a booking, in person or by fax to the **Prefettura della Casa Pontificia** (☎ 06 69 88 46 31; fax 06 69 88 38 65) on the Monday or Tuesday beforehand, between



9am and 1pm. To go in person, enter via the bronze doors under the colonnade to the right of St Peter's (facing the church).

VATICAN MUSEUMS

The **Vatican Museums** (Map pp636-7; adult/reduced €12/8, free last Sun of month; 🕒 from 8.45am Mon-Sat, last entrance 12.20pm Nov-Feb, 3.20pm Mar-Oct & Christmas time, 1.20pm Sat Mar-Oct; closed Sun except last Sun of month) contain an astonishing collection of art and treasures collected by the popes, and you'll need several hours to see the most important areas. Make sure you pick up a floor-plan leaflet. There are four very helpful 'one-way' itineraries, lasting from 1½ to five hours and mapped out with the aim of simplifying visits and containing the huge numbers of visitors. The Sistine Chapel comes towards the very end of a full visit; otherwise, you can walk straight there, but if you'd like to visit the Stanzas di Raffaello, do so first as you can't backtrack once in the chapel.

The **Museo Pio-Clementino**, containing Greek and Roman antiquities, is on the ground floor near the entrance. Through the superb **Galleria delle Carte Geografiche** (Map Gallery) and the

Galleria degli Arazzi (Tapestry Gallery) are the magnificent **Stanze di Raffaello**, once the private apartments of Pope Julius II, decorated with frescoes by Raphael. Of particular interest is the magnificent **Stanza della Segnatura**, which features Raphael's masterpieces *The School of Athens* and *Disputation on the Sacrament*.

From Raphael's rooms, go down the stairs to the sumptuous **Appartamento Borgia**, decorated with frescoes by Pinturicchio, and then down another flight of stairs to the **Sistine Chapel**, the private papal chapel built in 1473 for Pope Sixtus IV. Michelangelo's wonderful frescoes, *Creation* and *Last Judgment*, have been superbly restored to their original brilliance. It took Michelangelo four years, at the height of the Renaissance, to paint the *Creation*; 24 years later he painted the extraordinary *Last Judgment*. The other walls of the chapel were painted by artists including Botticelli, Ghirlandajo, Pinturicchio and Signorelli.

Piazza del Campidoglio & Musei Capitolini

Jog up the impressive steps to **Capitoline Hill**, the lowest of Rome's seven hills, the centre of Jupiter worship in ancient Rome and the

house of city government in medieval Rome. Michelangelo, the architectural rock star of his day, was commissioned to redesign the interior **Piazza del Campidoglio** (Map pp640-1), which he had face the Christian St Peter's rather than the pagan Forum. A modern copy of the bronze equestrian statue of Emperor Marcus Aurelius is at its centre; the original is on display in the ground-floor portico of the **Palazzo Nuovo** (Map pp640-1; Palazzo del Museo Capitolino).

Impressing visitors since 1471, the **Musei Capitolini** (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 96 74 00; adult/reduced €6.20/4.20; 🕒 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) is the oldest antiquities museum in the world.

Pantheon

Nowhere is the splendour of ancient Rome more evident than the **Pantheon** (Map pp640-1; Piazza della Rotonda; admission free; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-6pm Sun, 9am-1pm holidays), the best-preserved building of its time. The original temple was built in 27 BC by Marcus Agrippa, the son-in-law of Emperor Augustus, and dedicated to the planetary gods (Agrippa's name remains inscribed over the entrance). Later used as a Catholic church, the dome is an architectural marvel, even by today's standards. The oculus in the middle allows in light and was built with concrete that becomes lighter the closer it gets to the oculus, dispersing weight. Many Italian kings are buried here, as is Raphael.

Piazza Navona

Come to **Piazza Navona** (Map pp640-1) to watch as tourists, artists, pensioners and pickpockets jostle their way around the Renaissance architect Bernini's masterpiece, **Fontana dei Quattro Fiumi** (Fountain of the Four Rivers; Map pp640-1), sipping espresso in a sidewalk café (worth the expense) or slurping a gelato in the splendour of sun-drenched baroque palace masterpieces.

Piazza Campo de' Fiori

The colourful **Piazza Campo de' Fiori** (Map pp640-1), affectionately called 'Il Campo', was a place of execution during the Inquisition, while the artist Caravaggio went on the run after killing a man who had the gall to beat him in tennis on this piazza. Nowadays a **flower and vegetable market** is held here Monday to Saturday, artists congregate to sell their wares on Sunday and revellers fill the many bars nightly. The piazza has two fountains, which are enormous granite baths taken from the Baths of Caracalla.

Villa Borghese

This gorgeous **park** (Map pp636-7) was once the estate of Cardinal Scipione Borghese. His 17th-century villa houses the **Museo e Galleria Borghese** (☎ 06 328 10; www.galleriaborghese.it; admission €8.50/5.25; 🕒 9am-7pm, closed Mon), which has held an impressive art collection for over 300 years. Take a walk through the lovely, leafy park, which has a zoo and a lake full of ducks, swans and turtles. You can hire boats at the lake and bicycles near the Porta Pinciana entrance. Just north of the park is the **Galleria Nazionale d'Arte Moderna** (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 323 40 00; Viale delle Belle Arti 131; admission €6.50; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), a *belle époque* palace housing 19th- and 20th-century paintings. The Etruscan museum, **Museo Nazionale Etrusco di Villa Giulia** (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 322 65 71; admission €4; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm, closed Mon), is on the same street in Piazzale di Villa Giulia, in the former villa of Pope Julius III.

Trevi Fountain

The high-baroque **Fontana di Trevi** (Map pp640-1; Piazza di Crociferi), about six blocks northeast of the Pantheon, was designed by Nicola Salvi in 1732 and immortalised in Fellini's *La Dolce Vita*. It sprawls over almost the entire piazza and depicts Neptune's chariot being led by Tritons, with sea horses representing the moods of the sea. The custom is to throw a coin into the fountain (over your shoulder while facing away) to ensure your return to Rome; a second coin grants a wish.

Piazza di Spagna & Spanish Steps

The exquisite **Piazza di Spagna**, church and famous **Spanish Steps** (Scalinata della Trinità dei Monti; Map pp636-7) have long provided a major gathering place for foreigners and locals alike. Built with a legacy from the French in 1725, but named after the Spanish embassy to the Holy See, the steps lead to the church; the steps were constructed to link the piazza with the well-heeled folks living above it.

In the 18th century beautiful Italians gathered here, hoping to be chosen as artists' models. Today, beauties of both sexes still abound. To the right as you face the steps is the house where Keats spent the last three months of his life, in 1821. In the piazza is the boat-shaped fountain of the **Baraccia**, believed to be by Pietro Bernini, father of the famous Gian Lorenzo. One of Rome's most elegant and expensive shopping streets,

Via Condotti, runs off the piazza towards Via del Corso.

Piazza del Popolo

The vast and impressive **Piazza del Popolo** (Map pp636-7) was laid out in the 16th century at the point of convergence of three roads – Via Ripetta, Via del Corso and Via del Babuino – known as the 'trident'. **Santa Maria del Popolo** (Map pp636-7; Piazza del Popolo 12; 🕒 7am-noon, 4-7pm) houses two magnificent Caravaggio paintings (of St Peter and of St Paul). The piazza is at the foot of the **Pincio Hill** (Map pp636-7), which affords a *bella vista* of the city, especially in the early hours; Keats, Strauss, Ghandi and Mussolini liked strolling here.

Trastevere

The happening neighbourhood in Rome has a storied past, but its vibrant nightlife scene is soundly for the young at heart. The neighbourhood lights up at night as all ages take to the street on the evening *Passeggiata* (evening stroll), and its cadre of bars and restaurants spill out onto the streets.

Don't miss the **Basilica di Santa Maria in Trastevere** (Map pp640-1; Piazza di Santa Maria; ☎ 06 581 48 02; 🕒 7.30am-1pm, 4-7pm), in the lovely piazza of the same name, believed to be the oldest Roman church dedicated to the Virgin. Also take a look at the **Basilica di Santa Cecilia in Trastevere** (Map pp640-1; admission free; 🕒 9am-12.30pm & 4.15-6.30pm Mon-Sat), with its magnificent 13th-century fresco and oldest extent baptistry in Rome, dating back to possibly the 5th century.

Appia Antica & the Catacombs

When they say 'All roads lead to Rome', the Via Appia Antica (Appian Way) has been the most important and strategic of those roads for 2300 years. Construction began in 312 BC for military purposes. After Spartacus' revolt in 71 BC, it was lined with 6000 crucified slaves to serve as a sanguinary warning to all who travelled its path.

The Via Appia Antica is just southeast of the city and accessible on Metro Linea A to Colli Albani, then bus 660. It's technically traffic-free on Sundays if you want to walk or cycle it. Head first to the headquarters of **Parco Regionale dell'Appia Antica** (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 513 53 16; www.parcoppiaantica.org; Via Appia Antica 58; 🕒 9.30am-5.30pm Mar-Oct, 9.30am-1.30pm & 2pm-4.30pm Mon-Sat Nov-Feb). Bicycles are €3 per hour and €10

per day and are a great way to wander through this tranquil park.

The largest catacombs in Rome are along the Via Appia Antica, including the **Catacombs of San Callisto** (Via Appia Antica 110; adult/reduced €5/3; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Oct-May, until 5.30pm Jun-Sep) and **Catacombs of San Sebastiano** (Via Appia Antica 136; adult/reduced €5/3; 🕒 8.30am-noon & 2.30-5pm Mon-Sat, to 5.30pm Jun-Sep, closed mid-Nov to mid-Dec), within walking distance of each other, south of park headquarters. The Roman custom had been to cremate bodies, but as Christ rose from the dead, the first Christians wanted to preserve the corporeal bodies of the deceased...just in case.

Churches

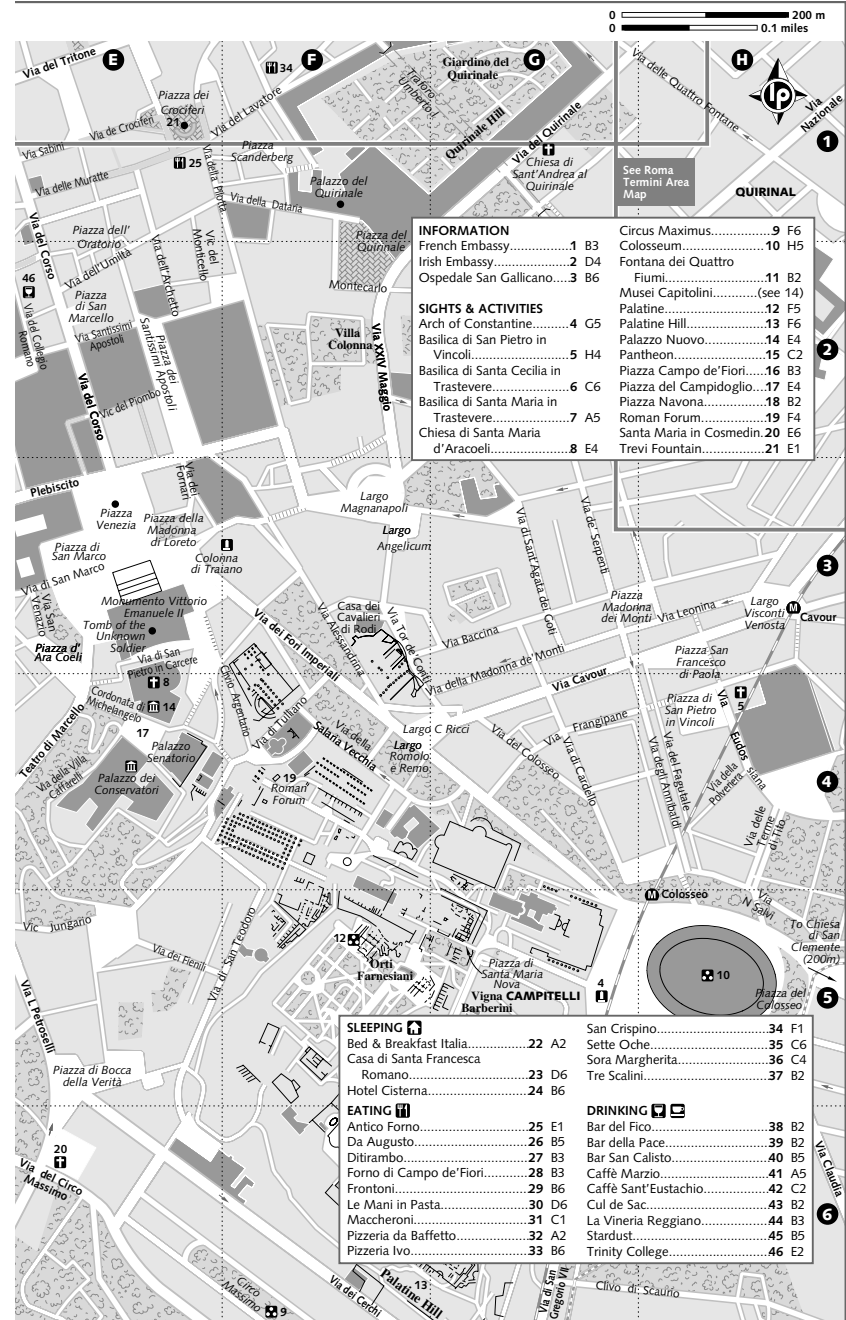
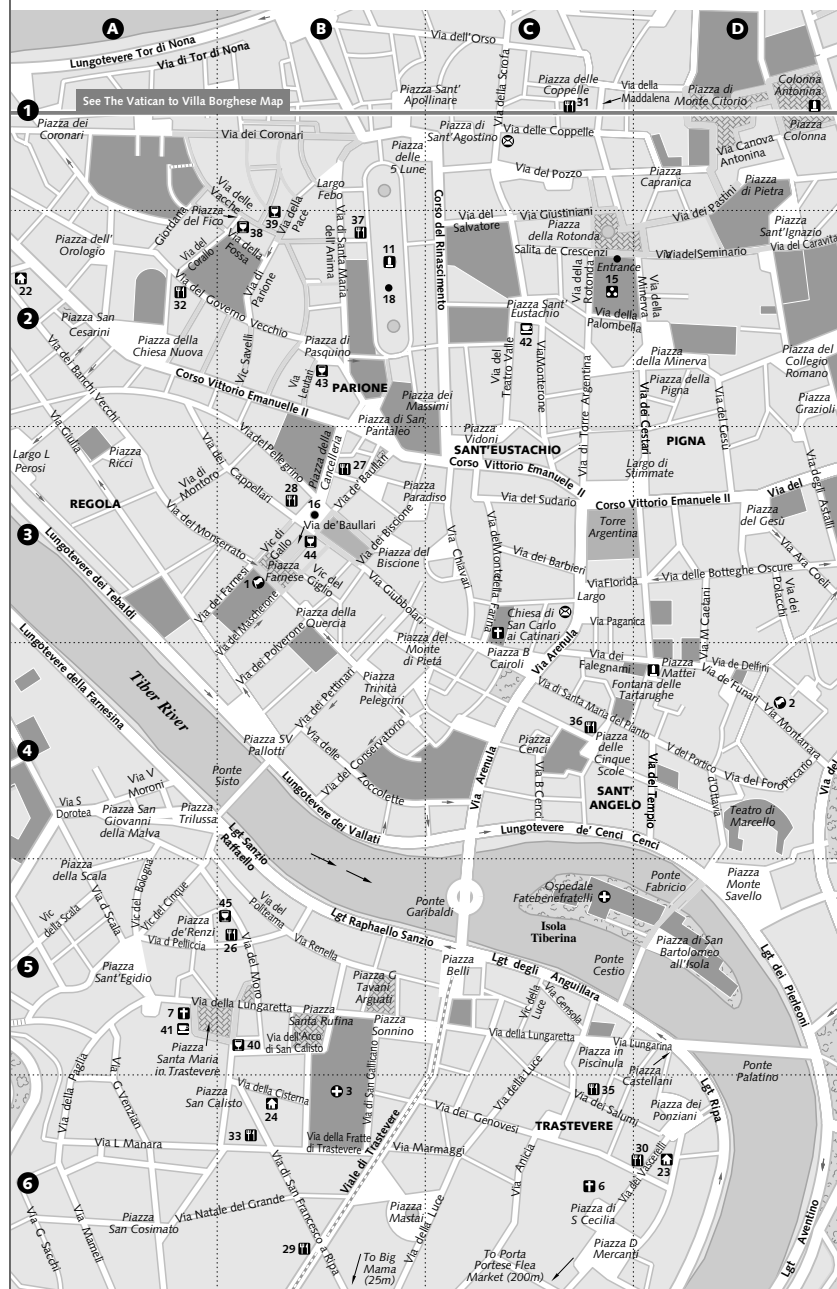
Down from Roma Termini is the massive **Basilica di Santa Maria Maggiore** (Map p634; Via Cavour; 🕒 7am-6.30pm), originally named Santa Maria della Neve and built by Pope Liberius in 352 after the Virgin Mary instructed him to construct a church on the spot where the next snow fell. Several mosaics date to the 5th century.

You can spend hours in the **Basilica di San Pietro in Vincoli** (Map pp640-1; Piazza San Pietro in Vincoli; 🕒 7am-noon & 3.30-7pm) simply gazing at Michelangelo's astonishing statue, *Moses*. Also, check out the chains reputedly worn by St Peter during his imprisonment before being crucified; hence the church's name (St Peter in Chains).

Chiesa di San Clemente (Map pp632-3; Via San Giovanni in Laterano; 🕒 9am-12.30pm, 3pm-6pm), east of the Colosseum, defines how history in Rome exists on many levels. The 12th-century church at street level was built over a 4th-century church that was, in turn, built over a 1st-century Roman house containing a temple dedicated to the pagan god Mithras.

Santa Maria in Cosmedin (Map pp640-1; Via del Circo Massimo; 🕒 10am-1pm & 2.30-6pm), northwest of **Circus Maximus** (Map pp640-1; Via del Circo Massimo), is regarded as one of the finest medieval churches in Rome. It has a seven-storey bell tower and its interior is heavily decorated with Cosmatesque inlaid marble, including the beautiful floor. The main attraction for masses of tourists is, however, its **Bocca della Verità** (Mouth of Truth) in front of the entrance (look for the hordes of bus tourists). Legend has it that if you put your right hand into the ceramic mouth and tell a lie, it will snap shut.

PANTHEON & TRASTEVERE AREA



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Baths of Diocletian & Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli

Just across the piazza from Termini, the **Baths of Diocletian** (Map p634; ☎ 06 488 05 30; Via Enrico De Nicola 79; admission €5; ☞ 9am-7.45pm Tue-Sun) were built at the turn of the 3rd century and accommodated up to 3000 visitors in a series of libraries, concert halls and gardens. Parts of the ruins are incorporated into the **Basilica di Santa Maria degli Angeli** (Map p634; Piazza della Repubblica; ☞ 7.30am-6.30pm), designed by Michelangelo around the original baths.

SLEEPING

The city tourism website is www.romaturismo.it and has excellent listings. For B&Bs or longer-term accommodation, try www.cross-pollinate.com.

There are dozens of hostels in Rome (most near the train station) and no fewer than 100 lower- to midrange hotels in the same area. The north end along Castel Pretorio holds the best quality low-priced places.

The head office of the **Italian Youth Hostel Association** (Associazione Italiana Alberghi per la Gioventù; Map p634; ☎ 06 487 1152; www.ostellionline.org; Via Cavour 44; ☞ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) has information about Hostelling International members in Italy and will assist with bookings to stay at universities during summer.

Pop Inn Hostel (Map p634; ☎ 06 495 98 87; www.popinnhostel.com; Via Marsala 80; dm €16-25, s €41-86, d €42-98; ☎) No curfew, free breakfast, free luggage storage and laundry make this a chill Termini-area spot.

Beehive (Map p634; ☎ 06 447 04 553; www.the-beehive.com; Via Marghera 8; dm/d/tr with shared bathroom €22/75/100; ☎) If the idea of carefully enforced 11pm quiet hours, an onsite organic café and hanging out petting the resident cat Ingmar doesn't scare the bejeezus out of you, this is your place. Reserve dorm beds far in advance.

Yellow Hostel (Map p634; ☎ 06 49 38 26 82; www.yellowhostel.com; Via Palestro 44; dm incl breakfast €24-34, s/d incl breakfast €25/50; ☎) Fun, young, hip, well run and often voted among the top hostels in Europe. All amenities are included: hot showers, fully equipped kitchen, festive common room with DVD, washer and dryers. Ask about neighbouring private singles and doubles; if available, they're an absolute steal.

Hotel Welome (Map p634; ☎ 06 47 82 43 43; www.welome.it; Via Calatafina 15/19; s €40-100, d €50-110) Double-paned windows block out street noise and

strong showers wash away the grit. There are hairdryers, phones and refrigerators in all rooms, and the chatty owner is a wealth of local info.

Albergo Sandra (Map p634; ☎ 06 445 26 12; www.geocities.com/hotelsandra; Via Villafranca 10; s/d/tr incl breakfast €70/96/120, without bathroom s/d/tr €50/80/90) A mere 10-minute walk from Termini, this medium-sized *pensione* has clean and pleasant rooms run by a woman who seems more than ready to retire.

Pensione Panda (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 678 01 79; www.pensioneapanda.com; Via della Croce 35; s/d €65/98/130, with shared bathroom €48/68) Close to the Spanish Steps, this 2nd-floor *pensione* has comfortable rooms with arched ceilings and helpful, English-speaking staff.

Casa di Santa Francesca Romano (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 581 21 21; istituto@sfronana.it; Via del Vascerelli 61; s/d/tr incl breakfast €70/100/123; ☎) This former noble home is now an inn run by the Catholic church with pretty rooms and a cloistered garden around a bubbling waterfall. Open to all travellers. Airport pickups available for €50.

Colors Hostel & Hotel (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 687 40 30; www.colorsotel.com; Via Boezio 31; s/d €75/120, dm/s/d with shared bathroom €25/65/100; ☎) Brightly painted walls and an effusively helpful staff makes this residential choice near the Vatican a great bet.

Hotel Cisterna (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 581 72 12; www.cisternahotel.it; Via della Cisterna 7/8/9; s/d incl breakfast €98/130; ☎) closed part of Aug; ☎) Location, location, location. In the centre of Trastevere but along a quiet street (pick a room in back) means putting up with cramped, dark rooms. Satellite TV and breakfast served on the courtyard.

EATING

Romans take visible pride in their *cucina* and traditional recipes. The roots of the local cuisine are the diet of the poor – hence a preponderance of *trippa* (tripe) – and the Roman-Jewish tradition, with legacies such as stuffed *fiori di zucca* (zucchini/courgette flowers) and *carciofi alla romana* (artichokes with garlic, mint and parsley). Locals rarely eat dinner before 9pm.

Snacks & Self-Catering

Foragers will be orgasmic in the lively food markets, held off Viale delle Millizie, just north of the Vatican, and in Piazza Vitto-

rio Emanuele (Map pp632-3), just south of Termini. There's also a well-stocked **Conad Supermarket** (Map p634; Roma Termini) underneath the main concourse of the station.

For quick eats, head to **Antico Forno** (Map pp640-1; Via della Muratte 8) for delicious oven-hot slices and hearty sandwiches; **Frontoni** (Map pp640-1; Viale di Trastevere) for good sandwiches made from local delicacies and sold by weight; or **Forno di Campo de' Fiori** (Map pp640-1; Campo de' Fiori 22) for metres of *pizza bianca* (pizza sans tomato sauce).

Gelati

The best gelato (ice cream) resides at **Fan Crispino** (Map pp640-1; Via della Panetteria 42), famous for its honey sorbet; **Old Bridge** (Map pp636-7; Via Bastioni di Michaelangelo 5), with XXL scoops perfect for a mid-museum pick-me-up; and **Tre Scalini** (Map pp640-1; Piazza Navona 30) for a memorable *tartufo nero* (black truffle) concoction.

Restaurants, Trattorias & Pizzerias

Sora Margherita (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 687 42 16; Piazza Cinque Scole 30; 1st/2nd courses €5/11; ☞ lunch Tue-Sun, dinner Fri & Sat only). The most popular restaurant in the Jewish Ghetto area, the menu is typical Roman/Jewish – fried artichokes and zucchini blossoms, home-made pasta, chickpea soup etc.

'Gusto (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 322 62 73; Piazza Augusto Imperatore 9; pastas from €6) Slick and savvy, this place is a melange of pizzeria, *osteria*, wine bar and kitchen shop. It's a worthy stop any time, with an excellent wine list, an enormous cheese selection and good people-watching.

Pizzeria da Baffetto (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 686 16 17; Via del Governo Vecchio 114; pizzas €8; ☞ dinner only) Any self-respecting pizza fan will make a stop at this Roman institution, which is always packed to the beams. Come very early or very late if you don't want to queue or share a table.

Ditirambo (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 687 16 26; Piazza della Cancelleria 7; 1st/2nd courses €8/11; ☞ closed Mon lunch) With wood-beamed ceilings, this cosy trattoria serves largely organic fare with a funky twist on Italian vegetarian, including leek pudding with marjoram sauce and red chicory (€8), and porcini flan with a *talleggio* cheese sauce (€10).

Maccheroni (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 683 07 895; Piazza delle Coppelle 44; 1st/2nd courses €8/13) Diners line up

for outside tables on warm summer nights and cheeky waiters entertain guests. The Roman dish *trippa* (tripe) is a speciality here.

WEST OF THE TIBER

Le Mani in Pasta (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 581 60 17; Via dei Genovesi 7; 1st/2nd courses €8/14, ☞ closed Mon) A great-value *osteria* in Trastevere, the name translates roughly as 'To have one's fingers in the pie'. Grilled fish and calamari are popular, but the reason to come here is – of course – the pasta dishes. Try the pasta with ricotta, pancetta and nutmeg.

Sette Oche (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 580 97 53; Via dei Salumi 36; lunch incl 1 drink €6.50-7.50; ☞ lunch Sat-Mon, dinner 7.30pm-midnight Tue-Sun) Chill at the 'Seven Ducks' restaurant, pizzeria and wine bar. Downstairs flaunts a Middle Eastern flair with wall tapestries, low tables and floor cushions. The owner often plays Italian folk music in the evenings.

Pizzeria Remo (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 574 62 70; Piazza Santa Maria Liberatrice 44; pizzas from €4.50) This place is loud and rowdy – filling with party types on weekend nights – but the cheap prices, pizza and *bruschette al pomodoro* (bruschettas with tomato) make the chaos and obligatory queues worth it.

Pizzeria Ivo (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 581 70 82; Via di San Francesco a Ripa 158; pizza €4.75; ☞ closed Tue) The pizzeria of choice in Trastevere for Trastevereans themselves, it's also quite popular for its grilled meats and *scamorza* (smoked cheese).

Da Augusto (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 580 37 98; Piazza de' Renzi 15; 1st/2nd courses €6/11) This bare-bones-but-beloved mamma's kitchen serves Roman classics – occasionally accompanied by a surly attitude.

AROUND ROMA TERMINI

Ristofer (Map p634; Via Marsala 15; two courses €6.50-7) The cafeteria for railway workers is also open to the very, very hungry.

La Gallina Bianca (Map p634; ☎ 06 474 37 77; Via Rosmini 9; starters/pizza/dishes €3.50/6.50/7) Italian trattoria-meets-English farmhouse feel. Grilled vegetables and smoked cheese (*scamorza*), strawberry tiramisu and overstuffed salads are winners.

Trimani (Map p634; ☎ 06 446 96 630; Via Cernaia 37; dishes from €5; ☞ closed Sun) Rome's biggest *enoteca* (wine bar) has a vast selection of regional wines along with excellent soups, pasta, canapés and *torta rustica* (quiche).

DRINKING

The days of Roman orgies are long gone. Rome's nightlife nowadays focuses more on late-night chats over drinks and a lengthy meal with friends than dancing till 4am (although both options are still amply available).

Cafés

Caffé Sant'Eustachio (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 686 13 09; Piazza Sant'Eustachio 82) Near the Pantheon, this place has been wowing visitors and Romans alike with practically perfect cappuccinos and espresso drinks for over 60 years.

Caffé Marzio (Map pp640-1; Piazza Santa Maria) This place in Trastevere has terrific coffee and views onto one of Rome's prettiest piazzas; perfection comes with a price, though.

Bars & Pubs

Bar San Calisto (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 583 58 69; Piazza San Calisto; ☹ closed Sun) Filled with drunks, bums, tourists and artists, all flock here for the groovy atmosphere that spills out onto the Piazza during the summer months. The chocolate gelato is legendary.

Bar del Fico (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 687 55 68; Piazza del Fico 24; ☹ 8am-2am Mon-Sat, from 6pm Sun) Popular with local actors and artists, this pretty bar has tables beneath its namesake fig tree – providing shade on sunny days and a hint of romance at night – and a snug interior with tasteful music and local art.

Cul de Sac (Map pp640-1; Piazza di Pasquino; small dishes €5-11; ☹ noon-4pm & 6pm-12.30am Tue-Sat) Tucked into a nook off Piazza Navona, this *carina* wine bar has communal wood benches out front, a chatty interior, simple but good *enoteca* fare such as cheese courses and salads, and a robust wine list.

La Vineria Reggiano (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 68 80 32 68; Campo de' Fiori 15; ☹ 9.30am-2pm & 6pm-1am Mon-Sat, to 2am Sun) Hit the cosy Vineria on the Campo, once the gathering place of the Roman literati.

Trinity College (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 678 64 72; Via del Collegio Romano 6; ☹ 11am-3am) If you're hankering for pub night, try Trinity College: it has a good selection of imported brews, great food and an easy-going ambience. It also gets packed on weekends.

Bar della Pace (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 686 12 16; Via della Pace 3-7) With its gilded ambience and dashing in-crowd, this is an atmospheric drinking spot.

SCAMS

Watch out for overly friendly strangers who find a way to approach you on the street and invite you for a drink. Once you've ordered drinks, the fun stops. You'll receive a bill for hundreds of euro, and the bar owners, who are in on the gig, make it clear you will be paying.

Live Music

Stardust (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 583 20 875; Vicolo dei Renzi 4; ☹ 7.30pm-2am Mon-Sat, from noon Sun) A tiny Trastevere pub-meets-jazz bar, this funky haunt purrs with sultry jazz and impromptu jam sessions, and doesn't close until the last customers tumble out the door. The grooviest Sunday brunch in Rome.

Radio Londra (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 575 00 44; Via di Monte Testaccio 65b, Testaccio) Popular and decked out like an air-raid shelter, with live music Wednesday to Saturday.

For jazz and blues featuring top international musicians, head to **Alexanderplatz** (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 397 42 171; Via Ostia 9; ☹ 8.30pm-2.30am Mon-Sat, concerts start at 10.15pm), near the Vatican, or **Big Mama** (☎ 06 581 24 51; www.bigmama.it; Via San Francesco a Ripa 18; ☹ 9pm-1.30am), just south of Piazza Mastai in Trastevere.

CLUBBING

The place to head for clubbing is Testaccio. At Roman nightclubs, expect to pay upwards of €20 just to get in, which may or may not include one drink.

Caffé Latino (Map pp632-3; Via di Monte Testaccio 36) Live Latin music and a disco of Latin and funk.

Caruso Caffé (Map pp632-3; Via di Monte Testaccio 36) Nearby and more sedate, with live music twice weekly and good DJs.

Gilda (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 679 73 96; Via Mario de' Fiori 97) With its plush décor and vast dance floor, Gilda attracts a slightly older, jackets-required crowd.

Le Cru (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 678 48 38; Via della Mercede 10/d) Oozing smoke and bedecked with tapestries, mirrors, candle-lit tables and kissing couples. There's no cover, but the cocktails, served in voluptuous glasses, are steep.

L'Alibi (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 574 34 48; Via di Monte Testaccio 44) Regarded as Rome's premier gay venue.

Popular stayers include **Alien** (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 841 22 12; Via Velletri 13; ☹ 10.30pm-4am Tue &

Thu-Sun), for sci-fi décor, dancers on raised platforms and hip-hop rhythms; and the far-flung **Goa** (☎ 06 574 82 77; Via Libetta 13; ☹ 11pm-3am Tue & Thu-Sun Oct-May), with its groovy ethnic décor and glam crowd, but a distant location south of the city near metro stop Garbatella.

ENTERTAINMENT

The best entertainment guide is **Roma C'è** (www.romace.it, in Italian; €1.20), with an English-language section, published on Wednesday. Daily newspapers *La Repubblica* and *Il Messaggero* have cinema, theatre and concert listings. All are available at newsstands. Rome's entertainment schedule is particularly heady in summer, with numerous alfresco performances; be sure to catch one if possible.

For theatre, opera and sporting events, book ahead through **Hello** (Map p634; Roma Termini), **Enjoy Rome** (Map p634; ☎ 06 445 18 43; www.enjoyrome.com; Via Marghera 8a; ☹ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) or **Orbis** (Map p634; ☎ 06 48 27 403; Piazza dell'Esquilino 37).

Cinema

Several cinemas show films in English, including **Multisala Barberini** (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 482 10 82; www.multisalarbarberini.it; Piazza Barberini 24/25/26) and **Warner Village Moderno** (Map p634; ☎ 47 77 92 01; Piazza della Repubblica 45/46), a megaplex showing Hollywood blockbusters and Italian films. Expect to pay €7, with discounts on Wednesday.

Opera & Classical Music

Teatro dell'Opera (Map p634; ☎ 06 481 60 28 706; www.operaroma.it, in Italian; Piazza Beniamino Gigli) Rome's

finest opera offerings from December to June; ticket prices are steep.

For a full season of concerts, there's the **Accademia di Santa Cecilia** (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 361 10 64; Via della Conciliazione 4) and the **Accademia Filarmonica Romana** (☎ 06 323 48 90; www.teatroolimpico.it; Teatro Olimpico, Piazza Gentile da Fabriano 17), about 2km north of the city – take the bus from Piazza Manzini.

GETTING THERE & AWAY

Air

Rome's main airport is **Leonardo da Vinci** (FCO; ☎ 06 65 95 55 71; www.adr.it), often simply called Fiumicino (after the town where it's located). Low-cost carriers are increasingly flying into **Ciampino** (CIA; ☎ 06 79 49 42 25; www.adr.it), which is closer to town. Once in town, you'll find the main airline offices northwest of Roma Termini, in the area around Via Bissolati and Via Barberini.

Boat

Tirrenia and the Ferrovie dello Stato (FS) ferries leave for various points in Sardinia from Civitavecchia. From Fiumicino, ferries head to Spain (Barcelona), Tunisia (Tunis), Sardinia (Golfo Aranci, Olbia and Cagliari) and Sicily (Palermo). Costs vary dramatically depending upon time of year, availability, walk on or car passengers etc. See the website www.traghettonline.net for information on prices.

Bookings can be made at the Termini-based agency **Passagi** (Map p634; ☹ 7.15am-9pm), at any travel agency displaying the Tirrenia or FS sign or online at www.traghettonline.net. You can also book directly with **Tirrenia** (Map

GETTING INTO TOWN

There are several options for getting to and from Rome's main airport, Leonardo da Vinci (FCO, often called Fiumicino), 30km southwest of the city centre. Ciampino (CIA) is 15km southeast of the city centre; it serves mostly low-cost carriers and national flights.

The convenient Leonardo Express train service (€9.50, 35 minutes) leaves the airport every 30 minutes from 6.37am to 11.37pm. Another train (€5) from Leonardo da Vinci stops at Trastevere, Ostiense and Tiburtina stations, but not at Termini, with a service from the airport every 20 minutes from 5.57am to 11.27pm.

The **Airport Shuttle** (☎ 06 420 14 507; www.airportshuttle.it) offers transfers to/from Leonardo da Vinci for €26 for one passenger and €6 for each additional passenger (add 30% between 10pm and 7am); and €42 to Ciampino for one or two passengers (€6 for each additional passenger).

The **Terravision** (☎ 06 659 58 646; www.terravision.it; single/return €8.50/13.50) bus departs from Ciampino outside Termini on Via Marsala 22. The journey takes 40 minutes, depending on traffic. Alternatively, take a Blue Cotral bus (running from 6.50am to 11.40pm) from the Anagnina metro stop (line A).

Taxis from the airport to the city centre run to about €50.

pp636-7; ☎ 06 42 00 98 03; Via San Nicola da Tolentino 5) or at the Stazione Marittima (ferry terminal at Civitavecchia). Take the train from Roma Termini to Civitavecchia (€4.10 to €8, one hour, every 30 minutes); it's about a 15-minute walk to the port (to your right) as you exit the station.

Bookings can be made at Roma Termini for FS ferries.

Bus

The main terminal for intercity buses is in Piazzale Tiburtina, in front of the Stazione Tiburtina. Catch Metro Linea B from Termini to Tiburtina.

Numerous bus lines run services to cities throughout Italy; all depart from the same area and the relevant ticket offices or agents are next to the bus terminus. For general information on which company services what area, go to **Enjoy Rome** (Map p634; ☎ 06 445 18 43; www.enjoyrome.com; Via Marghera 8a; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) or the **tourist office** (Map p634; ☎ 06 48 90 63 00; Roma Termini; ☎ 8am-9pm). For information and to make bookings, it's best and easiest to go through a travel agent, as most can book tickets on all long-distance buses:

Cotral (☎ 800 15 00 08; www.cotralspa.it, in Italian) Lazio region.

Marozzi (☎ 06 44 24 95 19; marozzi.it, in Italian) Sorrento, Brindisi, Matera and Lecce.

SENA (☎ 800 93 09 60; www.senabus.it) Siena.

Sulga (☎ 075 575 96 41; www.sulga.it) Perugia, Assisi and Romagna.

Car & Motorcycle

It's no holiday trying to motor yourself into Rome's centre, which has many traffic restrictions and can be exceedingly nerve-fraying to navigate. If you insist, the main road connecting Rome to the north and south is the Autostrada del Sole (A1), which extends from Milan to Reggio di Calabria. On the outskirts of the city it connects with the Grande Racordo Anulare (GRA), the ring road encircling Rome. It's best to enter or leave Rome via the GRA and the major feeder roads that connect it to the city. If approaching from the north, take the Via Salaria (SS4) or Via Flaminia (SS3) exits. From the south, take Via Appia Nuova (SS7) or Via del Mare (SS8), which connects Rome to the Lido di Ostia. All provide reasonably direct routes into the city. The A12 connects the city to both Civitavecchia and Leonardo da Vinci airport.

Car-rental offices at Roma Termini (Map p634) include **Avis** (☎ 06 481 43 73; www.avis.com), **Europcar** (☎ 06 488 28 54; www.europcar.com), **Hertz** (☎ 06 474 03 89; www.hertz.com) and **Maggiore National** (☎ 06 488 00 49; www.maggiore.it, in Italian). All have offices at both airports as well.

Happy Rent (Map p634; ☎ 06 481 81 85; www.happyrent.com; Via Farini 3) hires out scooters (from €31 per day), motorcycles (around €104 and up) and bicycles (from €62 per week). To see Rome in an unforgettable way, it even hires out Vespas with English-speaking drivers.

Train

Almost all trains arrive at and depart from Roma Termini, though some depart from Tiburtina. From Termini, there are regular connections to all major cities in Italy and throughout Europe. You can check the timetables at the train information desks at Roma Termini (Map p634) or call the **reservation line** (☎ 89 20 21; €0.30/min for recorded information, €0.54/min for a live person; ☎ 24hr) or check the website (www.trenitalia.com; in Italian and English). Trains start at around 5.45am and end at around 11pm; the side gates close after midnight, when it's nowhere that you'd want to be.

Services at Termini include telephones, money exchange, tourist information, post office, first aid (7am to 9pm), an underground mall and **luggage storage** (per piece for 5hr €3.80, per piece per hr from 5 to 12hr €0.60, per piece per hr thereafter €0.20; ☎ 6am-midnight).

GETTING AROUND

Car & Motorcycle

Negotiating Roman traffic is difficult by car or foot, but not impossible. Whether you're on foot, two or four wheels, remember to stay alert for crazed drivers (especially motorcyclists) attempting manoeuvres you thought only possible in movies.

If your car disappears after being parked illegally, check with the **traffic police** (☎ 06 676 91).

Public Transport

Rome has an integrated public transport system, so the same **Metrebus** ticket is valid for all modes of transport: bus, tram and metro. You can buy tickets at all *tabacchi*, newsstands and from vending machines at main bus stops. Single tickets cost €1 for 75 minutes, €4 for one day, €11 for three days and €16 per week. Tickets must be purchased before you get on

and validated in the orange machine as you board. Ticketless riders risk a hefty €51 fine, demanded on the spot in cash. Don't even try the 'But I'm a tourist! I didn't know!' line – it hasn't worked in a decade.

ATAC (☎ 800 43 17 84; www.atac.roma.it) is the city's public transport company. Free transport maps and details on bus routes are available at the ATAC information booth at the **Urban Bus Station** (Map p634; Piazza dei Cinquecento), where many of the main bus routes terminate. Largo di Torre Argentina, Piazza Venezia and Piazza San Silvestro are other hubs. Buses generally run from about 6am to midnight, while late-night buses are marked with an owl on top of the bus sign. A fast tram service, the 8, connects Largo Argentina with Trastevere, Porta Portese and Monteverde Nuovo.

The Metropolitana has two lines, A (the red line) and B (the blue line). Both pass through Roma Termini. Take Linea A for Piazza di Spagna, the Vatican (Ottaviano) and Villa Borghese (Flaminio), and Linea B for the Colosseum and Circus Maximus. Trains run approximately every five minutes between 5.30am and 11.30pm (12.30am on Saturday) for Linea B and 9pm for Linea A.

Taxi

Roman taxi drivers can be at the top of the fleecing-foreigners game, so make sure your taxi is licensed and keep an eye on the meter. **Cooperativa Radio Taxi Romana** (☎ 06 35 70) oversees many operators. You can't hail a taxi as in most cities, but there are major taxi ranks at the airports, Roma Termini and Largo Argentina in the historical centre (look for the orange-and-black taxi signs). There are surcharges from €1 to €3 for luggage, night service, Sunday and public holidays. Most taxi fares within Rome's historic centre will cost around €7 to €20. Taxis are on radio call 24 hours a day.

AROUND ROME Ostia Antica

While the ruins of Pompeii show off how the upper classes lived, Ostia's ruins display a once-thriving port city, where 100,000 Roman citizens lived and worked as far back as the 4th century BC. As Rome's port linking the Tiber river and the Mediterranean, Ostia became strategically important as both a merchant and defence centre. Barbarian invasions and the outbreak of malaria led to

Ostia Antica's eventual abandonment, but Pope Gregory IV re-established the city in the 9th century AD.

Of particular note in the **ruins** (☎ 06 563 58 099; adult/reduced €4/2; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Apr-Nov, 8.30am-5pm Mar, 8.30am-4pm Dec-Feb) of the excavated city are the mosaics of the **Terme di Nettuno** (Baths of Neptune); a **Roman theatre** built by Agrippa; the **forum** and **Capitolium temple**, dedicated to Jupiter, Juno and Minerva; and the **Piazzale delle Corporazioni**, the offices of Ostia's 70 merchant guilds, distinguished by mosaics depicting their different trades.

To get to Ostia Antica from Rome, take the Metro Linea B to Piramide, then the Ostia Lido train (getting off at Ostia Antica). By car, take the Via del Mare or the parallel-running Via Ostiense.

Tivoli

pop 49,254

Set on a hill by the Aniene River, Tivoli was a resort town of the ancient Romans and became popular as a summer playground for the wealthy during the Renaissance. The **tourist office** (☎ 0774 31 12 49; Largo Garibaldi; ☎ 8.30am-2.30pm Tue-Sat, 3-6pm Tue-Thu) is near the Cotral bus stop. To see evidence of the Renaissance head to the ornate gardens of **Villa d'Este** (☎ 0774 31 20 70; Piazza Trento; admission €9; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Tue-Sun Mar-Oct, 9am-4.30pm Nov-Feb) or to the ruins of **Villa Adriana** (☎ 0774 53 02 03; admission €6.50; ☎ 9am-1hr before sunset), to see what the Roman emperor Hadrian (as in Hadrian's Wall) thought a little summer villa should look like.

Tivoli is 30km east of Rome and accessible by Cotral bus from outside the Ponte Mammolo station on Metro Linea B. Buses depart every 20 minutes and cost €1.60. The fastest route by car is on the Rome-L'Aquila autostrada (A24).

Tarquinia

pop 15,472

Without a Tarquinia, there would never have been a Rome as we know it. The Etruscan capital Tarquinia was founded as far back as the 12th century BC and rivalled Athens in its grand scale. Many Tarquin kings ruled Rome just after the mythic founding by Romulus after killing his twin Remus in 753 BC. Although the Etruscans were the greatest Italic rulers before the Romans, not much of their culture remains. Most of what scholars know comes from the very walls

of Tarquinia's **necropolis** (☎ 0766 85 63 08; Via Ripagretta; admission €4 or €6.50 incl museum; 🕒 8.30am-6.30pm Tue-Sun). Added as a Unesco World Heritage site in 2004, it has thousands of hewn graves, many painted with scenes of Etruscan life. Stop in at the **Museo Nazionale Tarquiniense** (☎ 0766 85 60 36; Piazza Cavour; admission incl necropolis €6.50; 🕒 9am-7pm Tue-Sun), which boasts cool ruins, such as sarcophagi laden with everyday tools, and you can still also admire frescoes from the tombs. Keep an eye out for a few red-and-black plates featuring acrobatic sex acts, which the Etruscans were quite famous for: the words 'Etruscan' and 'prostitute' were even used interchangeably.

There's a **tourist information office** (☎ 0766 85 63 84; Piazza Cavour 1; 🕒 8am-2pm Mon-Sat) just past the medieval ramparts.

Cotral buses leave every hour for Tarquinia from outside the Lepanto stop on Metro Linea A, arriving at Barriera San Giusto, a short distance from the tourist office.

NORTHERN ITALY

Italy's well-heeled north is a fascinating area of historical wealth and natural diversity. Bordered by the northern Alps it encompasses some of the country's most spectacular coastline (the Cinque Terre) and the decidedly un-picturesque Po valley plain. Of the cities it's Venice that hogs the limelight, but Turin, Genoa and Bologna also have plenty to offer. Verona is one of Italy's most beautiful cities while Padua, Ferrara and Ravenna all reward a visit.

GENOA (GENOVA)

pop 605,089

A city of aristocratic *palazzi* and malodorous alleyways, of Gothic architecture and industrial sprawl, Genoa is a compelling place. You need only walk the labyrinthine, sometimes seedy, streets of the *centro storico* (historic centre) to feel its raw energy. Birthplace of Christopher Columbus (1451-1506) and home to Europe's largest aquarium, it was once a powerful maritime republic known as *La Superba*.

Orientation & Information

Central Genoa is concentrated between the two main train stations: Brignole and Principe. The central shopping strip, Via XX

Settembre, starts southwest of Stazione Brignole and leads up to Piazza dei Ferrari. From adjacent Piazza Giacomo Matteotti, Via San Lorenzo goes down to the waterfront and historic centre.

There are tourist offices at the **airport** (☎ 010 601 52 47; 🕒 9.30am-1.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-5pm Sun), **city centre** (☎ 010 868 74 52; www.apr.genova.it; Piazza Giacomo Matteotti; 🕒 9am-1pm & 3-6pm), **ferry terminal** (☎ 010 246 36 86; 🕒 9.30am-12.30pm & 1.30-5.30pm) and **Stazione Principe** (☎ 010 246 26 33; www.apr.genova.it; 🕒 9.30am-1pm & 2.30-6pm Mon-Sat).

Sights & Activities

Head for the *centro storico* for a taste of Genoa's rough (sometimes very rough) charm. On the waterfront the **Porto Antico** (www.portoantico.it), Genoa's old port, was given a makeover before the city's stint as European City of Culture in 2004. Interest centres on the **Acquario** (Aquarium; ☎ 010 234 56 78; www.acquariodigenova.it; Ponte Spinola; admission €14; 🕒 9.30am-7.30pm Mon-Fri, to 8.30pm Sat & Sun). Europe's largest aquarium. Designed by Renzo Piano, it houses 5000 animals in six million litres of water.

Search out the Gothic 12th-century **Cattedrale di San Lorenzo** (Piazza San Lorenzo; 🕒 8-11.45am & 3-6.45pm) and the **Palazzo Ducale** (☎ 010 557 40 04; www.palazzoducale.genova.it, in Italian; Piazza Giacomo Matteotti 9; admission varies; 🕒 9am-6.30pm Tue-Sun), once the seat of the city government, now Liguria's main exhibition space.

Genoa's main museums are on **Via Garibaldi**. The three most important, known collectively as the **Musei di Strada Nuova** (☎ 010 247 63 51; adult/child €7/5; 🕒 9am-7pm Tue-Fri, from 10am Sat & Sun), are housed in **Palazzo Bianco** (Via Garibaldi 11), **Palazzo Rosso** (Via Garibaldi 18) and **Palazzo Doria-Tursi** (Via Garibaldi 9). Tickets, valid for all three, are available from the bookshop in Palazzo Doria-Tursi.

GETTING INTO TOWN

From Cristoforo Colombo airport the **Volabus** (☎ 558 24 14; 🕒 5.30am-10.30pm) airport shuttle goes to Piazza Verdi (€3, 25 minutes, half hourly), outside Stazione Brignole, also stopping at Stazione Principe. From Stazione Brignole the centre is an easy walk away - cross Piazza Verdi, go down Via Fiume and turn right up Via XX Settembre to Piazza dei Ferrari.

Still on Via Garibaldi, the **Galleria Nazionale di Palazzo Spinola** (☎ 010 247 70 61; Piazza Pellicceria 1; admission €4; 🕒 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sat, 1-8pm Sun) displays major Renaissance works.

Sleeping

Ostello Genova (☎ 010 242 24 57; hostelge@iol.it; Via Costanzi 120; dm/s/d per person incl breakfast €15/22/20; 🕒 closed Jan, 11.30pm curfew) Genoa's HI hostel is a functional, modern affair that leaves little lasting impression, apart from the panoramic city views. Take bus 40 from Brignole; 35 or 40 from Principe.

Carola (☎ 010 839 13 40; www.albergocarola.it; Via Gropallo 4; d €70, s/d with shared bathroom €40/60) A classic old-school *pensione* near Stazione Brignole. Guests are welcomed as if friends and the 3rd-floor rooms are simple, small and spotless.

Hotel Bel Soggiorno (☎ 010 54 28 80; www.belsoggiornohotel.com; Via XX Settembre 19; s/d incl breakfast €82/107; 🍷) Exuding a chintzy, yesteryear atmosphere, this charming hotel is worth a bit extra for its excellent location, friendly owner and 200 characterful rooms.

Eating

Regional specialties include *pesto* (a sauce of basil, garlic, pine nuts and Parmesan), *pansoti* (ravioli in ground walnut sauce) and focaccia.

The **oriental market** (Via XX Settembre 75r) is good for cheap fresh food. For fried seafood (about €5) head to the Via Sottoripio arcades on the waterfront. There's a slew of places along Via Balbi, near Stazione Principe, offering good-value pasta (€5 to €6).

Il Barbarossa (☎ 010 246 50 97; Piano di Sant'Andrea 21/23r; 1st/2nd courses €7/10) A warm, woody, brick-vaulted *enoteca-cum-café* with wine by the glass (from €3.50), pasta, *panini* and beer.

Threagaio (☎ 010 246 57 93; Piazza delle Erbe 17/19r; salads €4.50, snacks €5-10) On one of Genoa's hip squares, this bright, unpretentious bar is ideal for a midday salad or a lingering *aperitivo*. It gets very busy at lunchtime but relaxes in the evening as the cocktails start to flow.

Drinking & Entertainment

Action centres on the *centro storico* and, in summer, the seafront. There are several good bars around Piazza delle Erbe and Piazza Raibetta.

Mentelocale Café (☎ 010 595 96 48; Palazzo Ducale, Piazza Giacomo Matteotti 9) A contemporary café

by the entrance to Palazzo Ducale. Sit on the Dali-inspired red sofas and sip on something cool as you eye up fellow drinkers.

Cosa Zapata (Via Sampierdarena 36; 🕒 9pm-3am Fri & Sat) Music fans should seek this *centro sociale* (organised squat), where Genoa's alternative crowd mosh to modern music within medieval walls.

Getting There & Away

Cristoforo Colombo airport (code G0A; ☎ 010 601 54 10; www.airport.genova.it; Sestri Ponente), is 6km west of the city.

The main bus terminal is on Piazza della Vittoria, south of Stazione Brignole. Book tickets at **Geotravels** (☎ 010 58 71 81; Piazza della Vittoria 57).

Ferries sail from the **ferry terminal** (☎ 166 152 39 393; www.porto.genova.it; Via Milano 51), west of the city centre. Companies include:

Grandi Navi Veloci (☎ 800 46 65 10; www2.gnv.it) To/from Sardinia (Porto Torres €49, 11 hours; Olbia €38, 10 hours), Sicily (Palermo €75, 20 hours), Barcelona (€56, 18 hours) and Tunis (€104, 24 hours).

Moby Lines (☎ 010 254 15 13; www.mobylines.it) To/from Corsica (Bastia €15, four hours) and Sardinia (Olbia €42, seven hours).

Tirrenia (☎ 800 82 40 79; www.tirrenia.it) To/from Sardinia (Porto Torres €55, 10 hours; Olbia €40, 13½ hours).

There are direct trains to La Spezia (€8, 1½ hours, half hourly), Pisa (€14, two hours, half hourly), Rome (€34, 5¼ hours, eight daily) and Turin (€13, two hours, up to 20 daily).

It generally makes little difference whether you choose Brignole or Principe stations.

RIVIERA DI LEVANTE

Curving southeast from Genoa, Liguria's eastern Riviera boasts some of Italy's most dramatic, and expensive, coastline. The highlight is the Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre, just north of La Spezia. Summer gets very crowded so try to visit in spring or autumn; viable bases include Santa Margherita and La Spezia.

There are tourist offices at **Santa Margherita** (☎ 0185 28 74 85; www.apptgullio.liguria.it; Via XXV Aprile 4; 🕒 9.30am-12.30pm & 3-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Sun Jun-Sep, 9.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-May) and **La Spezia** (☎ 0187 77 09 00; www.aprcinqueterre.sp.it; Viale Mazzini 45; 🕒 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun). For specific information on the Cinque Terre ask at the **park office** (☎ 0187 76 00 00; www.parcnazionale5terre.it; Via Signorini 118; 🕒 8am-6pm) in Riomaggiore.

Sights & Activities

After you've explored elegant Santa Margherita pop down to celeb-haunt **Portofino** and **Camogli**, a gorgeous fishing village turned resort. From Portofino, you can walk to the Benedictine **Abbazia di San Fruttuoso** (☎ 0185 77 27 03; Camogli; admission €4; ☞ 10am-6pm May-Sep, to 4pm Tue-Sun Mar, Apr & Oct, to 4pm Sun Dec-Feb).

For the coast's best scenery strike south to the **Parco Nazionale delle Cinque Terre**. Named after its five tiny villages – Riomaggiore, Manrola, Corniglia, Vernazza and Monterosso – this Unesco-listed park encompasses some of Italy's most picturesque coastline. The villages, all accessible by train, are linked by the 12km **Via dell'Amore** (Lovers' Lane; toll €3), a beautiful, mildly challenging day's walk.

Details of the park's walking and cycle trails are available from the park office. You can hire snorkelling and diving gear and kayaks at the **Diving Center 5 Terre** (☎ 0187 92 00 11; www.5terrediving.com; Via San Giacomo) in Riomaggiore.

Sleeping & Eating

Between April and September, reserve ahead.

Ostello 5 Terre (☎ 0187 92 02 15; www.cinqueterre.net/ostello; Via B Riccobaldi 21; dm €22; ☑) In Manrola, this private hostel is justifiably popular. Beds are in six-person single-sex dorms, most of which have sea views and all of which are clean and bright. Book ahead.

Nuova Riviera (☎ 0185 28 74 03; info@nuovariviera.com; Via Belvedere 10/2; Santa Margherita; s/d €89.90/99.90, with shared bathroom €60/70; ☞) Housed in a villa full of antiques, chandeliers and mosaic floors, the Nuova Riviera is excellent value. Divided between the villa and a nearby annex, rooms are airy and inviting. Cash only for rooms with shared bathrooms.

Bar Centrale (☎ 0187 92 02 08; Via Colombo 144; internet per hr €6; ☑) Hub of Riomaggiore high jinks, the Bar Centrale bar is, in the off-season, your only real carousing option. In summer it's the most raucous.

Osteria No 7 (☎ 0185 28 17 03; Via J Ruffini 36, Santa Margherita; 1st/2nd courses €7/8) Boisterous and down-to-earth, this is a real find, serving fantastic regional fare in great, steaming portions. Try the tasty *seppie in umido* (cuttlefish stew).

Also recommended:

La Dolce Vita (☎ 0187 760044; Via Colombo 120; beds from €20) An *affittacamere* (private house renting out rooms) in Riomaggiore with simple holiday rooms.

Edi (☎ 0187 92 03 25; Via Colombo 111; d €55-70) Sunny rooms and apartments in Riomaggiore.

Getting There & Around

From Genoa trains run to Santa Margherita (€2.10, 35 minutes, half hourly) and La Spezia (€8, 1½ hours, half hourly). From La Spezia regional trains to/from the Cinque Terre run twice hourly between 6am and 9.15pm; unlimited travel between Levanto and La Spezia is covered by the *biglietto giornaliero Cinque Terre* (24-hour Cinque Terre rail pass, €5.40).

In summer various ferry companies ply the coastal waters: **Servizio Marittimo del Tigulio** (☎ 0185 28 46 70; www.traghettiportofino.it) operates to/from Santa Margherita and Genoa; **Trasporti Marittimi Turistici Golfo Paradiso** (☎ 0185 77 20 91; www.golfoparadiso.it, in Italian) runs between Genoa, Camogli and the Cinque Terre; and **Navigazione Golfo dei Poeti** (☎ 0187 96 76 76; www.navigazionegolfodeipoeti.it) connects La Spezia and the Cinque Terre.

TURIN (TORINO)

pop 867,855

Long written off as a bleak industrial centre, Turin is a dynamic, cosmopolitan city. Even if the vast regal palaces (Turin was home to Italy's royal Savoy family), baroque piazzas and world-class museums fail to impress, the thriving café culture and vibrant nightlife are sure to win you over. And with the city gleaming in the aftermath of the 2006 Winter Olympics, now's the time to go.

Orientation & Information

Porta Nuova train station is the main point of arrival; however, from 2007 most trains will be using Stazione Porta Susa. From Porta Nuova cross Piazza Carlo Felice and follow Via Roma for Turin's two main piazzas: San Carlo and Castello.

Information is available from three **tourist offices** Atrium Torino (☎ 011 53 51 81; www.turismotorino.org; Piazza Solferino; ☞ 9.30am-7pm); Porta Nuova (☎ 011 53 51 81; ☞ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun); airport (☎ 011 53 51 81; ☞ 8.30am-10.30pm).

Sights & Activities

Consider the **Torino Card** (48/72hr card €16/18), available at tourist offices and valid for all public transport and discounts or entry to 120 museums, monuments and castles.

Turin's grandest square is **Piazza Castello**, dominated by **Palazzo Madama**, and the mid-17th century **Palazzo Reale** (☎ 011 436 14 55; Piazza Castello; admission €6.50; ☞ 9am-7.30pm Tue-Sun) whose **Giardino Reale** (Royal Garden; admission free; ☞ 9am-1hr

before sunset) was designed in 1697 by Louis le Nôtre, noted for his work at Versailles.

Nearby, **Piazza San Carlo**, known as Turin's drawing room, is famous for its cafés and twin baroque churches **San Carlo** and **Santa Cristina**.

The **Cattedrale di San Giovanni Battista** (☎ 011 436 15 40; Piazza San Giovanni; ☞ 7am-12.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, from 8am-Sun) houses the Holy Shroud (*Sindone*) a copy of which is on display in front of the altar (the real thing is kept in a vacuum-sealed box). Believers claim the linen cloth was used to wrap the crucified Christ; carbon dating, however, puts the cloth as 13th century. Investigate yourself at the **Museo della Sindone** (Museum of the Shroud; ☎ 011 436 58 32; Via San Domenico 28; adult/child €5.00/2.50; ☞ 9am-noon & 3-7pm).

Turin's **Museo Egizio** (Egyptian Museum; ☎ 011 561 77 76; www.museoegizio.org; Via Accademia delle Scienze 6; admission €6.50; ☞ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun), houses the world's most important collection of ancient Egyptian art outside of Cairo and London.

Towering 167m over the city the **Mole Antonelliana** (Via Montebello 20) is Turin's most recognisable building. Worth a look in its own right, it's home to the fabulous **Museo Nazionale del Cinema** (☎ 011 813 85 60; www.museonazionaledelcinema.org; Via Montebello 20; adult/concession €5.20/4.20; ☞ 9am-8pm Tue-Fri & Sun, to 11pm Sat). Don't miss the glass **Panoramic Lift** (adult/child €3.60/2.60), which whisks you up 85m in 59 seconds – unless, of course, you suffer from vertigo.

Sleeping & Eating

Campeggio Villa Rey (☎ 011 819 01 17; Strada Superiore Val San Martino 27; per person/tent/car €7/6/1.50; ☞ Mar-Oct) Set amid the greenery of Turin's hills, the closest camping ground to the city centre is east of the River Po. Take bus 61 from Porta Nuova to the end of the line, then bus 54.

Ostello Torino (☎ 011 660 29 39; ostello.torino@libero.it; Via Alby 1; dm/s/d per person incl breakfast €14.50/20/19; ☞ ☑) Turin's HI hostel is quiet and clean with three- or eight-person dorms and family rooms

GETTING INTO TOWN

A **Sadem** (☎ 011 300 01 66; www.sadem.it, in Italian) shuttle (€5.50, 40 minutes, every 45 minutes) runs from the airport to the city centre, stopping at the corner of Via Camerana and Corso Vittorio Emanuele II. From Porta Nuova train station cross Piazza Carlo Felice and head north along Via Roma for the centre.

with private bathrooms. Wi-fi is a further plus. Catch bus 52 from Porta Nuova (64 on Sunday), otherwise it's a steep 1.8km walk.

Albergo Sila (☎ 011 54 40 86; Piazza Carlo Felice 80; s/d €58/68) A homely *Pensione* within a stone's throw of Porta Nuova. The old-fashioned 3rd-floor rooms are overseen by a friendly English-speaking old girl.

Il Granaio (☎ 011 562 10 03; Via San Francesco d'Assisi; mains €6; ☞ lunch Mon-Sat) Walk through the pasta shop to this cheap, self-service canteen. Locals flock here for great pasta and *castagnaccio* (chestnut-flour cake topped by pine kernels and rosemary).

Pizzeria Stars & Stripes (☎ 011 516 20 52; Piazza Paleocapa 20; pizzas/1st/2nd courses €7/7/12; ☞ closed Sun & Mon lunch) Although offering a full menu of pastas and mains, it's the pizzas that stand out at this colourful joint. Toppings range from the trad to the rad – think tandoori chicken, marinated tuna, caviar and vodka. Fortunately, not all on the same pizza.

Getting There & Around

In Caselle, 16km northwest of the city centre, **Turin airport** (code TRN; ☎ 011 567 63 61; www.turin-airport.com) serves flights to/from European and national destinations.

Direct trains connect with Milan (€16, 1½ hours, 30 daily), Venice (€33, five hours, five daily), Genoa (€13, two hours, up to 20 daily) and Rome (€44, seven hours, seven daily).

PIG OUT FOR THE PRICE OF A DRINK

Eating out in Turin needn't cost a fortune. In fact, during aperitif hour (6.30pm to 9.30pm) it costs no more than the price of a drink. The procedure is simple: choose a café with a likely-looking buffet, go in, order a drink (from about €5) and tuck in. Then, when you're done, go back for more. And we're not talking about a sorry smorgasbord of depressed salads and dodgy dips, but a sumptuous spread of pasta, risotto, dinky little pizza puffs, deep-fried snacks, cheese, ham, salami and salad.

Recommended cafés include **Caffé Elena** (☎ 011 812 33 41; Piazza Vittorio Veneto 5), **Lobelix** (☎ 011 436 72 06; Via Corte d'Appello 15f) and **La Drogheria** (☎ 011 812 24 14; Piazza Vittorio Veneto 18).

CENTRAL MILAN

0 400 m
0 0.2 miles

SIGHTS & ACTIVITIES

Castello Sforzesco.....	7	A4
Duomo.....	8	B5
Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II.....	9	B5
Musei del Castello..... (see 7)		
Pinacoteca di Brera.....	10	B4

SLEEPING

Hotel Due Giardini.....	11	D2
Hotel Nettuno.....	12	D2
Hotel Nuovo.....	13	C5

EATING

Di per Di.....	14	D2
Fabbrica.....	15	A2
Osteria del Lazzaretto.....	16	D2
Supermarket.....	17	D1
Supermarket.....	18	D1

DRINKING

Bar Brera.....	19	B4
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ENTERTAINMENT

Box Office.....	20	B5
Teatro alla Scala.....	21	B4

INFORMATION

Grazia Internet.....	1	D1
Main Post Office.....	2	A5
Pharmacy.....	3	D1
Police Station (Questura).....	4	B3
Malpensa Shuttle.....	5	B5
Tourist Office.....	6	D1

TRANSPORT

Autostradale..... (see 23)		
Local Bus to Linate Airport.....	22	C5
Malpensa Bus Express..... (see 23)		
Supermarket.....	23	D1
Starfly..... (see 23)		
Train Information Office.....	24	D1

MILAN (MILANO)

pop 1.27 million

Milan's a difficult city to enjoy on a budget. Sure, it's free to window-shop in the designer boutiques and ogle the fashion models, but the polluted city centre doesn't lend itself to idle wandering and there are few must-see sights. The wicked nightlife is an expensive consolation.

Originally founded by Celtic tribes in the 7th century BC, Milan was conquered by the Romans in 222 BC and developed into a major trading and transport centre. From the 13th century it flourished under the rule of two powerful families, the Visconti and the Sforza. Today, it's capital of Italian fashion and finance.

Orientation

From Stazione Centrale train station, take the yellow MM3 underground (Metropolitana Milanese) line to Piazza del Duomo. The city's main attractions are concentrated in the area between the piazza and Castello Sforzesco.

Information

Grazia Internet (Piazza Duca D'Aosta 40; per hr €4;

☎ 8am-midnight) Next to Stazione Centrale. Also wi-fi access.

Main post office (Via Cordusio 4; M Duomo)

☎ 02 669 09 35; Stazione Centrale; ☎ 24hr)

Police station (Questura; ☎ 02 622 61; Via Fatebenefratelli 11; M Turati)

Tourist offices Piazza del Duomo (☎ 02 72 52 43 00;

www.milanoinfotourist.com; Via Marconi 1; ☎ 8.45am-1pm & 2-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 2-5pm Sat & Sun; M Duomo); Stazione Centrale (☎ 02 72 52 43 60; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-12.30pm & 1.30-5pm Sun); Malpensa Airport (☎ 02 748 67 213; ☎ 9am-5pm Mon-Fri) Pick up free guides *Hello Milano* and *Milano Mese*.

Sights & Activities

With a capacity of 40,000, Milan's landmark **Duomo** (Piazza del Duomo; admission free; ☎ 7am-7pm; M Duomo) is the world's largest Gothic cathedral. Commissioned in 1386 to a florid French-Gothic design and finished nearly 600 years later, it's a fairy-tale ensemble of 3400 statues, 135 spires and 155 gargoyles. Climb to the **roof** (stairs/elevator €3.50/5; ☎ 9am-5.45pm) for memorable city views.

Nearby, the elegant **Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II** shopping arcade leads towards **Teatro alla**

Scala (see p654), the world's most famous opera house.

The dramatic 15th-century **Castello Sforzesco** (☎ 02 884 63 700; www.milano castello.it; Piazza Castello 3; admission free; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Tue-Sun; M Cairoli) was the Renaissance residence of the Sforza dynasty. It now houses the **Musei del Castello** (☎ 02 884 63 703; admission €3; ☎ 9am-5.30pm), a group of museums dedicated to art, sculpture, furniture, archaeology and music.

For more art make your way to the **Pinacoteca di Brera** (☎ 02 72 26 31; www.brera.beniculturali.it; Via Brera 28; admission €5; ☎ 8.30am-7.15pm Tue-Sun; M Monte Napoleone), whose heavyweight collection includes Mantegna's masterpiece, the *Dead Christ*.

Milan's most famous painting – Leonardo da Vinci's *Last Supper* – is in the **Cenacolo Vinciano** (☎ 02 894 21 146; www.cenacolovinciano.org; Piazza Santa Maria delle Grazie 2; admission €8, bookings compulsory; ☎ 8.15am-6.45pm Tue-Sun; M Cadorna Triennale), just west of the city centre.

Sleeping

Budget hotels are concentrated in the streets southeast of Stazione Centrale. Note that they fill quickly during frequent trade fairs. Always check rates as prices can drop by as much as a third when there's no fair on.

Stello Piero Rotta (☎ 02 392 67 095; milano@stelloonline.org; Via Martino Bassi 2; dm incl breakfast €19; M Q18) If you're in town for a football match, Milan's HI hostel is conveniently located in the San Siro neighbourhood. Low on atmosphere, it's cheap, clean and not a lot else.

Hotel Nuovo (☎/fax 02 864 60 542; Piazza Beccaria 6; d/tr €100/135, s/d with shared bathroom €30/50; M San Babila) In a city where 'cheap' is an ugly word, the Nuovo is a bastion of budget accommodation. Rooms are basic but the location, just off Corso Vittorio Emanuele II, is as central as it gets.

Hotel Due Giardini (☎ 02 295 21 093; www.hotelduegiardini.it; Via Benedetto Marcello 47; s €25-75, d €30-130; ☎; M Lima) A laid-back family *pensione* with modest, mid-sized rooms and gnomes in the back garden. The décor leaves less of an impression than the attractive rates.

Hotel Nettuno (☎ 02 294 04 481; www.nettunomilano.it; Via Tadino 27; s €35-90, d €50-150; ☎; M Lima) Fresh from a new paint job the comfortable, pastel-shaded rooms here are a far cry from the hotel's dark, cavernous foyer. Wi-fi is available.

GETTING INTO TOWN

From Malpensa airport, **Malpensa Shuttle** (☎ 02 585 98 31 85; www.airpullman.com) buses run to/from Piazza Luigi di Savoia every 20 minutes between 5am and 11pm. Tickets for the 50-minute journey cost €5. **Malpensa Bus Express** (☎ 0331 51 90 00) services depart from the same piazza half hourly between 5.15am and 10.35pm; tickets are €5.50 and the journey takes 50 minutes. Alternatively you can take the **Malpensa Express** train to Stazione Nord (southwest of Castello Sforzesco). There are half-hourly departures between 5.50am and 8.20pm (buses take over from 8.20pm until 11.20pm). The 40-minute journey costs €9.30 or €11.50 if you buy your ticket on board.

From Linate airport, **Starfly** (☎ 02 585 87 237) buses run to Piazza Luigi di Savoia every 30 minutes between 6.05am and 11.45pm; tickets cost €3 and the journey time is 25 minutes. A cheaper option is to take local bus 73 to Piazza San Babila (€1, 20 minutes, every 10 minutes).

If you land at Orio al Serio airport near Bergamo, **Autostradale** (☎ 035 31 84 72; www.autostradale.it) operates half-hourly buses to Piazza Luigi di Savoia between 4.30am and 1am; the journey lasts one hour, tickets are €6.90.

Eating

Save money by eating in one of the canteen-style Brek or Ciao chains where a decent pasta costs about €4. For pizza, Spizzico is a good bet. All have numerous city outlets. Self-caterers can shop at the two supermarkets in Stazione Centrale or at nearby **Di per Di** (Via Casati 30; ☎ 8.30am-8pm Mon-Sat).

Osteria del Lazzaretto (☎/fax 02 669 62 34; Via Lazzaretto 15; 1st/2nd courses €7/10; ☎ Repubblica) Good honest Italian food is what you pay not a lot for here. Go for one of the three set menus (€5.20/7.50/9.30) or choose from the selection of Milanese classics, including risotto and *cotolletto* (breaded veal cutlet).

Fabbrica (☎ 02 655 27 71; Via Pasubio 2; pizza/pasta from €5/7; ☎) Around the corner from clubbing nexus Corso Como, fashionable Fabbrica is a good spot to pizza-up before a night on the tiles.

Tsuru (☎ 02 837 83 66; Via Lagrange 13; sushi €6-20) A cross between a rustic trattoria and sushi bar, the hugely popular Tsuru serves great-value sushi and sashimi. Slightly southwest of the centre, it's near the Navigli nightlife. Take tram 3 from Via Torino, southwest of Piazza Duomo.

Drinking

Milan's drinking is centred on Brera and Navigli.

Bar Brera (☎ 02 87 70 91; Via Brera 23; ☎ Monte Napoleone/Lanza) One of the many cafés in upmarket Brera, this low-key bar fills early with the well-dressed aperitif set. In summer sit under the awnings on the cobbled street.

La Sacrestia (☎ 333 321 07 50; Via Conchetta 20) Dubbing itself an 'alcoholic pharmacy' La Sac-

restia serves potent medicine. An atmospheric Navigli drinking spot, it sports an eclectic look with red velvet curtains, frescoes and a black panther on the bar. Take tram 3 from Via Torino, southwest of Piazza Duomo.

Entertainment

The opera season at **Teatro alla Scala** (☎ 02 86 07 75; www.teatroallascala.org; Piazza della Scala; ☎ Monte Napoleone) runs from November to July. Tickets are available online or from the **box office** (☎ 02 72 00 37 44; Galleria del Sagrato, Piazza del Duomo; ☎ noon-6pm; ☎ Duomo) beneath Piazza del Duomo.

A mecca for football fans, the **San Siro** (Stadio Giuseppe Meazza; ☎ 02 404 24 32; Via Piccolomini 5; ☎ Lotto) is home to AC Milan and Internazionale. Match tickets (from €15) are available from branches of Cariplo bank (AC Milan) and Banca Popolare di Milano (Inter). To get to the stadium take the free shuttle bus (on match days) from the Lotto (MM1) metro station.

Shopping

For ludicrously expensive designer boutiques head to the Golden Quad: the area around Via della Spiga, Via Sant'Andrea, Via Monte Napoleone and Via Alessandro Manzoni northeast of Piazza del Duomo (ideally with someone else's credit card). Street markets are held around the canals, notably on Viale Papiniano on Tuesday and Saturday mornings.

Getting There & Away

AIR Most international flights use **Malpensa airport** (MXP; www.sea-aerportomilano.it), about 50km northwest of Milan. Domestic and some Eu-

ropean flights use **Linate** (LIN; www.sea-aeroporto.milano.it) about 7km east of the city. For all flight information call ☎ 02 748 52 200. Increasingly budget airlines are flying to/from **Orio al Serio airport** (code BGY; www.sacbo.it) around 55km northeast of the city, near Bergamo.

TRAIN

Regular trains depart Stazione Centrale for Venice (€22, three hours, 23 daily), Florence (Eurostar, €29, 2¾ hours, 22 daily), Rome (Eurostar, €47, 4½ hours, 20 daily) and other Italian and European cities. Check timetables at the station **information office** (☎ 7am-9pm). Regional trains stop at Stazione Porta Garibaldi (at Piazza Sigmund Freud, northeast of the centre) and Stazione Nord in Piazzale Cadorna (southwest of Castello Sforzesco).

Getting Around

Milan's public transport is excellent, with metro (MM), tram and bus services. Tickets (€1) are valid for one underground ride or up to 75 minutes' travel on city buses and trams, and are available at metro stations, tobacconists and newsstands.

VERONA

pop 258,115

Don't miss Verona, one of Italy's most beautiful cities. Shakespeare set Romeo and Juliet here and as you wander its suggestive lanes you'll understand why. Known as *piccola Roma* (little Rome) in imperial days, Verona's heyday came in the 13th and 14th centuries under the Della Scala (aka the Scaligeri) family, a period noted for the savage family feuding on which the Bard based his tragedy.

GETTING INTO TOWN

There are regular buses between Verona-Villafranca airport and the main train station (€4.50, 15 minutes, every 20 minutes between 5.40am and 11.10pm).

If you're flying with Ryanair you'll be landing at Brescia airport, from where shuttle buses (€11, 25 minutes, one daily) connect to Verona train station.

From the bus terminal in front of the train station bus 11, 12, 13 and 14 (Nos 91 and 92 on Sunday) go to Piazza Brà, Verona's central square.

The **Verona Card** (1/3 days €8/12), covers city transport and the main monuments. Pick it up at one of the three **tourist offices** (city centre ☎ 045 806 86 80; www.tourism.verona.it; Via degli Alpini 9; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun; train station ☎ 045 800 08 61; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun; airport ☎ 045 861 91 63; ☎ 11am-5pm Mon-Sat). Alternatively, do your own online research at **Veron@web** (Via Roma 17; per hr €3.50; ☎ 11am-10pm Mon-Fri, 2-8pm Sat & Sun).

Sights & Activities

In Piazza Brà the 1st-century Roman **amphitheatre** (☎ 045 800 32 04; Piazza Brà; adult/concession €4/3; ☎ 8.30am-7.15pm Tue-Sun, 1.30-7.15pm Mon), known as the Arena, is the third largest in existence. With a capacity of 20,000, it's now Verona's opera house and main concert venue.

On Via Cappello, you'll find **Casa di Giulietta** (Juliet's House; ☎ 045 803 43 03; Via Cappello 23; courtyard free, museum adult/concession €4/3; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Tue-Sun, 1.30-7.30pm Mon). Go through the graffiti-covered gate to see literature's most celebrated balcony and a statue of Juliet. Superstition holds that rubbing Juliet's right breast brings you a new lover – a technique to be copied with caution. Further along the street is **Porta Leoni**, one of the city's Roman gates; the other, **Porta Borsari**, is north of the Arena.

Piazza delle Erbe is lined with extravagant *palazzi* and filled with market stalls. Through the **Arco della Costa**, Piazza dei Signori is flanked by the medieval town hall and **Palazzo degli Scaligeri**, the former residence of the Della Scala family.

Sleeping

Ostello Villa Francescatti (☎ 045 59 03 60; fax 045 800 91 27; Salita Fontana del Ferro 15; dm incl breakfast €15.50, meal €9; ☎ 11.30pm curfew) Housed in a 16th-century villa set in its own gorgeous grounds, Verona's is arguably Italy's prettiest HI hostel. Take bus 73 from the train station (bus 90 on Sundays).

L'ospite (☎ 045 803 69 94; www.lospite.com; Via XX Settembre 3; apt for 1/2/4 people €45/80/120; ☎) Over the river from the *centro storico*, L'Ospite has six self-contained flats. Decorated with wood beamed-ceilings and colourful furniture, they're ideal for longer stays.

Eating & Drinking

Trattoria All'Isolo (☎ 045 59 42 91; Piazza dell'Isolo 5a; 1st/2nd courses €6/9; ☎ Thu-Tue) Cross the river to this trattoria for home-made *bigoli* (thick whole-meal spaghetti) and challenging meat dishes such as *coniglio in umido* (rabbit stew).

For cheap pasta try the self-service **Brek** (☎ 045 800 45 61; Piazza Brà 20; 1st/2nd courses €3/5); for excellent takeaway **Pizza Doge** (☎ 045 59 68 53; Via Roma 21b; slice €3.50) serves a mean slice.

Verona's nightlife is centred on Via Sottoriva. Hot spots include **square** (☎ 045 597 120; Via Sottoriva 15; ☎ 6.30pm-2am Tue-Sat, 5pm-1am Sun) where you can drink cocktails, have a shiatsu massage and surf the net; and **Sottoriva 23** (☎ 045 800 99 04; Via Sottoriva 23; ☎ 10-2am), a low-lit cavern bar.

Entertainment

The opera season at the **Arena** (☎ 045 800 51 51; www.arena.it; tickets €10-157; ☎ Jul-Sep) runs from July to September. Tickets are available online.

Getting There & Around

Verona-Villafranca airport (code VRN; ☎ 045 809 56 66; www.aeroportideldgarda.it) is 12km outside the city and accessible by bus from the train station (€4.50, 15 minutes, every 20 minutes between 5.40am and 11.10pm). Ryanair flies to **Brescia airport** (code VBS; ☎ 030 965 65 99). Shuttle buses (€11, 45 minutes) connect to the train station.

From the bus terminal in front of the train station, buses 11, 12, 13 and 14 (91 and 92 on Sunday) go to Piazza Brà.

Verona has direct trains to Milan (€14, two hours, half hourly), Venice (€12.50, 1½ hours, half hourly) and Bologna (€14, 1¾ hours, 20 daily).

MANTUA (MANTOVA)

pop 47,820

Nestled between three lakes (Superiore, Inferiore and Mezzo) placid Mantua makes a rewarding day trip from Verona. Best known for its immaculate medieval centre and grandiose palaces, it was for centuries (1328 to 1707) the stronghold of the Gonzaga family, one of Italy's most powerful Renaissance dynasties.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0376 43 24 32; www.turismo.mantova.it; Piazza Andrea Mantegna 6; ☎ 9am-7pm daily) is helpful.

On **Piazza Sordello**, the enormous **Palazzo Ducale** (☎ 0376 22 48 32; adult/concession €6.50/3.25; ☎ 8.45am-7.15pm Tue-Sun), was the seat of the Gonzaga family. The highlight is the **Camera degli Sposi** (Bridal Chamber), with 15th-century frescoes by Mantegna. You need to book to visit the *camera* between 15 March and 15 June and 1 September and 15 October – call ☎ 041 241 18 97.

Nearby, the 15th-century **Basilica di Sant'Andrea** (☎ 0376 32 85 04; Piazza Andrea Mantegna; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-7pm) safeguards several golden vessels said to contain earth soaked by Christ's blood.

The weekend **market** is more diverse than similar shows in cities twice Mantua's size.

Casa Margherita (☎ 349 750 61 17; www.lacasadi.margherita.it; Via Broletto 44; s/d €60/75-100; ☎) is a lovely B&B right in the heart of the medieval centre. There are three large rooms, each with tasteful furnishings. Extra beds can be added on request.

Eat at the **Ristorante Masseria** (☎ 0376 36 53 03; Piazza Broletto 8; pizzas/1st/2nd courses €7/7/10; ☎ Fri-Wed) and you get the added bonus of seeing Mantua's oldest frescoes (15th century) on the walls. For a filling local dish, the *stracotta con polenta* (beef stew) is tasty.

The easiest way to get to Mantua is by train from Verona (€2.30, 40 minutes, hourly).

PADUA (PADOVA)

pop 208,940

A lively university city, Padua is a fun place to hang out. But what really makes a visit worthwhile is the Cappella degli Scrovegni and its stunning Giotto frescoes. Thousands of pilgrims also come to pay their respects to St Anthony who is buried in the city's cathedral. Padua is also a feasible base for Venice, only 37km away.

From the train station the city centre is a 1.5km walk along Corso del Popolo and its continuation Corso Garibaldi. Alternatively, take bus 3 or 8.

Get information from the two **tourist offices** (train station ☎ 049 875 20 77; www.turismopadova.it; ☎ 9.15am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon Sun; Galleria Pedrocchi ☎ 049 876 79 27; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat).

Sights & Activities

The **PadovaCard** (☎ 049 876 79 27; €13), available from tourist offices and participating sights, provides free public transport and entry to many sights, including the Cappella degli Scrovegni (plus €1 booking fee).

Padua's biggest drawcard, the **Cappella degli Scrovegni** (☎ 049 201 00 20; www.cappelladeglisrovegni.it; Piazza Eremitani 8; admission €12; ☎ 9am-7pm), is covered from floor to ceiling with frescoes by Giotto. Divided into 38 colourful panels (c1304-06), they boldly depict episodes from Christ's life. Visits, for which you'll need to book at least 24 hours in advance, are limited to 15 minutes.

Tickets also cover the adjacent **Musei Civici agli Eremitani** (☎ 049 820 45 51; Piazza Eremitani 8; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sun) and its collection of Veneto art.

On the other side of the *centro storico*, the **Basilica di Sant'Antonio** (☎ 049 824 28 11; Piazza del Santo; admission free; ☎ 6.30am-7.45pm), is an important place of pilgrimage. Each year thousands of visitors come to file past the surprisingly gaudy **tomb** of St Anthony, Padua's patron saint.

In the square outside the basilica, the *Gattamelata* (Honeyed Cat) equestrian statue is by Donatello.

Sleeping & Eating

Ostello della Città di Padova (☎ 049 875 22 19; www.ctgveneto.it/ostello2; Via A Aleardi 30; dm incl breakfast €15.50) Functional and friendly, Padua's HI hostel has beds in large single-sex dorms and four-person family rooms. Take bus 3, 8 or 12 to Prato della Valle and ask for directions.

Koko Nor Association (☎ 049 864 33 94; www.bbkonor.it; Via Selva 5; d from €60) This association can help you find B&B-style accommodation in private family homes or furnished flats in Padua and environs.

Albergo Verdi (☎ 049 836 41 63; www.albergoverdidipadova.it; Via Dondi dall'Orologio 7; s/d incl breakfast €70/90; ☎) A brand new hotel with groovy multicoloured rooms and glaring modern art. Rooms are small but the sharp contemporary look and central location make it excellent value.

Dalla Zita (Via Gorizia 16; panini from €2.50) Join the hungry workers at this well-known sandwich bar. With descriptions of more than 100 *panini* on the walls you're bound to find something you like.

L'Anfora (☎ 049 65 66 29; Via dei Scincin 13; 1st/2nd courses €5/10; ☎ Mon-Sat) A traditional *osteria*, with bare wooden tables and racked wine bottles, L'Anfora is good for simple classics like *pasta e fagioli* (pasta and beans) and *fegato alla veneziana* (liver and onions).

Getting There & Away

SITA buses (☎ 049 820 68 44; www.sitabus.it) arrive from Venice (€3, 45 minutes, hourly) at Piazze Boschetti, 200m south of the train station.

There are also regional trains to/from Venice (€2.50, 40 minutes, every 20 minutes) and direct services to Verona (€10, 1¼ hours, every 20 minutes), and Bologna (€10, 1½ hours, half hourly).

VENICE (VENEZIA)

pop 271,665

Venice is a hauntingly beautiful place: a strange, surreal city in which everyday life seems somehow more dramatic than elsewhere. Even Venetian traffic jams are impressive – chintzy gondolas, *vaporetti* (water buses) and delivery barges, all massed on the Grand Canal. But the beauty comes at a price. Both for you (Venice is Italy's most expensive city) and for the city itself (Venice's atmospheric and frequently flooded alleyways simply weren't designed for up to 20 million visitors a year).

Surprisingly, though, it's still possible to escape the crowds. Away from Piazza San Marco and the main monuments, there are parts of the city that rarely see many tourists. Make for the back lanes of the Dorsoduro and Castello *sestieri* (districts) for a glimpse of Venice's beguiling and melancholic nature.

History

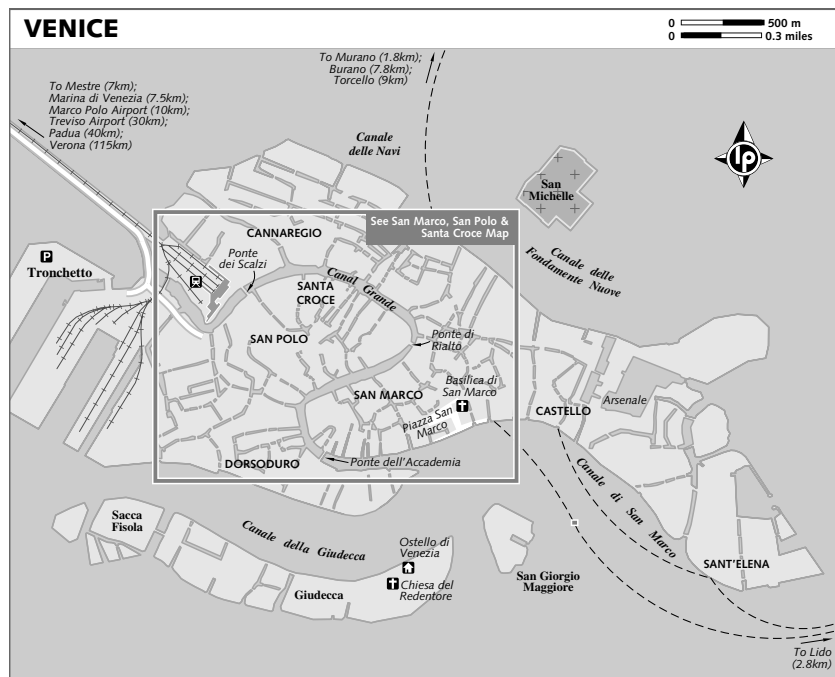
Venice's origins date to the 5th and 6th centuries when barbarian invasions forced the Veneto's inhabitants to seek refuge on the lagoon's islands. The city was initially ruled by the Byzantines from Ravenna, but in AD 726 the Venetians elected their first *doge* (duke).

Over successive centuries the Venetian Republic grew into a great merchant power, dominating half the Mediterranean, the Adriatic and the trade routes to the Levant – it was from Venice that Marco Polo set out for China in 1271. Decline began in the 16th century and in 1797 the city authorities opened the gates to Napoleon who, in turn, handed the city over to the Austrians. In 1866 Venice was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy.

Orientation

Everybody gets lost in Venice. How can you not in a city built on 117 islands with 150-odd canals and 400 bridges? (Only three of these cross the Grand Canal: the Rialto, the Accademia and, at the train station, the Scalzi.)

It gets worse: Venetian addresses are almost meaningless to all but local posties. Instead of a street and civic number they often consist of no more than the district (Venice is divided into six districts – Cannaregio, Castello, San Marco, Dorsoduro, San Polo and Santa Croce) followed by a long number. Some, however, do have street names and where possible we've



provided them. You'll still need to know that a street can be a *calle*, *ruga*, *salizzata*, *fondamenta* or a *rio terrà*. A canal is a *rio* and a square a *campo* (Piazza San Marco is Venice's only piazza).

The most helpful points of reference are the train station in the northwest and Piazza San Marco (St Mark's Square) in the south. The signposted path between the two – the nearest Venice has to a main drag – is a good half-hour walk.

Forming a land barrier between the lagoon and the Adriatic Sea, the Lido is a vaporetto ride away from Piazza San Marco.

Information

EMERGENCY

Police station (Questura; ☎ 041 271 55 11; Fondamenta di San Lorenzo, Castello 5053)

INTERNET ACCESS

There are tons of Internet cafés in Venice, none cheap. The airport is a wi-fi hotspot. **e copie d@ Toni** (Calle delle Bande, Castello 5268; per hr €7; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm)

Internet Point San Pantalon (Calle dei Preti Crosera,

Dorsoduro 3812a; per hr €9; ☎ 9.15am-8pm Mon-Fri, 9.15am-1pm & 3.30-7pm Sat)

Internet Point Santo Stefano (Campo Santo Stefano 2958; per hr €9; ☎ 10.15am-8pm)

Planet Internet (Rio Terrà San Leonardo, Cannaregio 1520; per hr €8; ☎ 9am-11pm)

LAUNDRY

Speedy Wash (Rio Terrà San Leonardo, Cannaregio 1520; 8kg wash/dry €5/3; ☎ 9am-10pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

24-hour pharmacies are listed in *Un Ospite a Venezia* (A Guest in Venice), a free guide available in many hotels.

Ospedale Civile (☎ 041 529 41 11; Campo SS Giovanni e Paolo 6777)

MONEY

There are plenty of banks (most with ATMs) near Ponte di Rialto and around San Marco.

American Express (☎ 041 520 08 44; Salizzata San Moisè 1471; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Travellex (☎ 041 528 73 58; Piazza San Marco 142; ☎ 8.50am-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-5pm Sun)

POST

Post office (Salizzata del Fontego dei Tedeschi)

TOURIST INFORMATION

Pick up *Un Ospite di Venezia* at hotels or the useful *Leo Bussola* guide at tourist offices: the **Azienda di Promozione Turistica** (☎ central information line 041 529 87 11, www.turismovenezia.it) has offices across town:

Lido (Gran Viale Santa Maria Elisabetta 6a; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-6pm Jun-Sep)

Marco Polo airport (Arrivals Hall; ☎ 9.30am-7.30pm)

Piazza San Marco (Piazza San Marco 71f; ☎ 9am-3.30pm Mon-Sat)

Piazzale Roma (☎ 9.30am-1pm & 1.30-4.30pm) In the basement of the car park over the road from the bus ticket office.

Train station (☎ 8am-6.30pm)

Venice Pavilion (☎ 10am-6pm) Near Piazza San Marco.

Sights

A good way to whet your sightseeing appetite is to take vaporetto 1 along the **Grand Canal**, which is lined with rococo Gothic, Moorish and Renaissance palaces. Alight at Piazza San Marco, itself Venice's most famous sight.

PIAZZA SAN MARCO (ST MARK'S SQUARE)

Flanked by the arcaded **Procuratie Vecchie** and **Procuratie Nuove**, the piazza is filled for much of the day with tourists, pigeons, balloon-vendors and policemen. While you're taking it all in, you might see the bronze *mori* (Moors) strike the bell of the 15th-century **Torre dell'Orologio** (clock tower).

But it's to the **Basilica di San Marco** (St Mark's Basilica; ☎ 041 522 52 05; Piazza San Marco; admission free; ☎ 9.45am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun) that all eyes are drawn. An architectural salad of spangled spires, Byzantine domes, mosaics and marble, it was originally built to house the remains of St Mark. According to legend, and his body was stolen from Alexandria in Egypt and smuggled to Venice in a barrel of pork. He's since been reburied several times, his body is now resting under the high altar. The original chapel was destroyed by fire in AD 932 and a new basilica was consecrated in its place in 1094. For the next 500 years it was a work in progress as successive *doges* added mosaics and embellishments looted from the East. The bronze horses above the entrance are replicas of statues 'liberated' from Constantinople in the Fourth Crusade (1204); the originals are in the **Galleria** (admission €3; ☎ 9.45am-5pm Apr-Oct, to

GETTING INTO TOWN

From Marco Polo airport take an **ATVO** (☎ 041 520 55 30; www.atvo.it, in Italian) bus (€3, 20 minutes, hourly) or ACTV bus 5d (€2, more than 50 daily) to Piazzale Roma. Alternatively, **Alilaguna** (www.alilaguna.com; €10; ☎ 70 minutes, hourly between 8.20am and 10.20pm) operates a fast ferry service from near Piazza San Marco. From Treviso Airport, catch the ATVO **Eurobus** (€5, one hour) to Piazzale Roma.

To get to St Mark's Square from Piazzale Roma or the nearby train station either walk – it's about half an hour along Lista di Spagna and its various continuations – or take vaporetto 1 or 82.

4pm Nov-Mar). Behind the main altar the **Pala d'Oro** (admission €1.50; ☎ 9.45am-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 2-4pm Sun May-Sep, to 4.30pm Mon-Sat Oct-Apr) is a stunning gold altarpiece decorated with priceless jewels.

The basilica's freestanding 99m **campanile** (bell tower; adult/child €6/3; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Jun & Sep-Oct, to 9pm Jul-Aug, 9.30am-4.15pm Nov-Mar) dates to the 10th century although it suddenly collapsed on 14 July 1902 and had to be rebuilt.

PALAZZO DUCALE

The official residence of the *doges* from the 9th century and the seat of the Republic's government, the **Palazzo Ducale** (Doge's Palace; ☎ 041 271 59 11; Piazzetta di San Marco; admission with Museum Pass/Card; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar) also housed Venice's prisons. On the 2nd floor, the massive **Sala del Maggior Consiglio** is dominated by Tintoretto's *Paradiso* (Paradise), one of the world's largest oil paintings, measuring 22m by 7m.

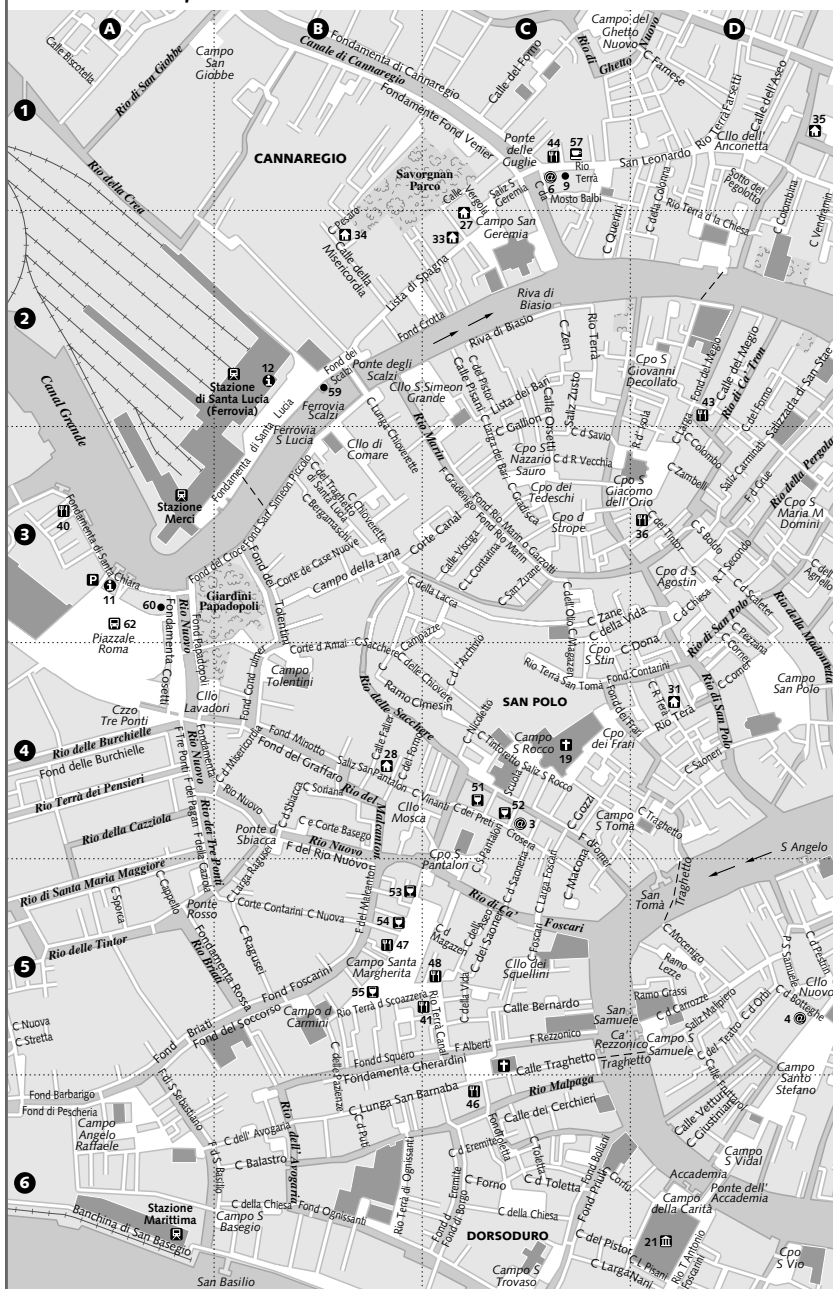
The **Ponte dei Sospiri** (Bridge of Sighs) connects the palace to an additional wing of the city dungeons. Named after the sighs the prisoners emitted en route, it owes its romantic image to Giacomo Casanova who, for a brief period, languished in the cells.

GALLERIA DELL'ACCADEMIA

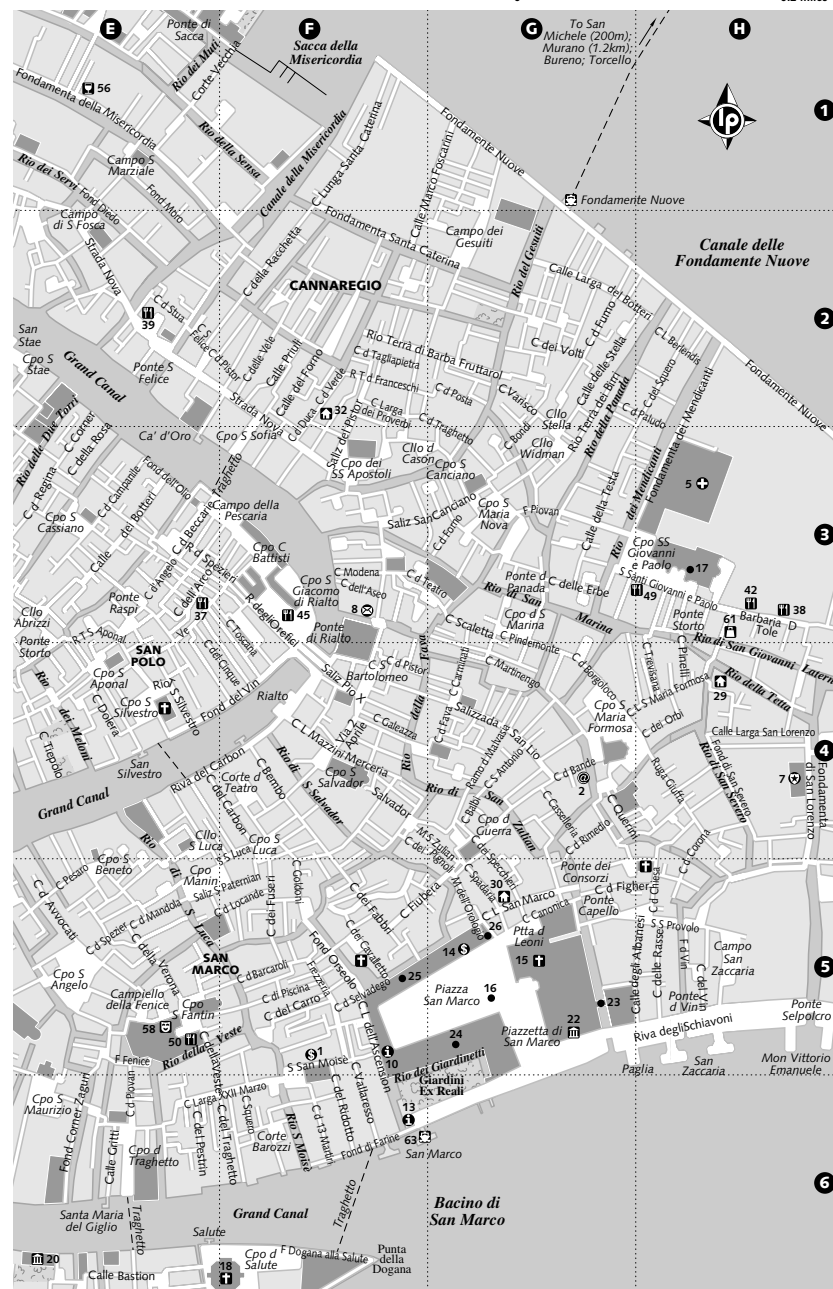
One of Venice's top galleries, the **Galleria dell'Accademia** (☎ 041 522 22 47; Dorsoduro 1050; adult/EU citizens 18-25 yrs €6.50/3.25; ☎ 8.15am-2pm Mon, to 7.15pm Tue-Sun) traces the development of Venetian art from the 14th to the 18th century. You'll find works by Bellini, Titian, Carpaccio, Tintoretto, Giorgione and Veronese.

ITALY

SAN MARCO, SAN POLO & SANTA CROCE



ITALY



0 300 m
0 0.2 miles



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e copie d@ Toni.....	2 G4	Market.....	45 F3
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		Il Doge.....	41 C5

COLLEZIONE PEGGY GUGGENHEIM

For something more contemporary, visit the **Collezione Peggy Guggenheim** (☎ 041 240 54 11; www.guggenheim-venice.it; Palazzo Venier dei Leoni, Dorsoduro 701; adult/student €10/5; ☎ 9am-6pm Wed-Mon). Housed in the American heiress' former home, the spellbinding collection includes works by, among others, Bacon, Pollock, Picasso and Dalí. In the sculpture garden you'll find the graves of Peggy and her dogs.

CHURCHES

See the Admission discounts box (p664) for details of the Chorus Pass.

Scene of the annual Festa del Redentore (see opposite), the **Chiesa del Redentore** (Campo del SS Redentore 194; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1-5pm Sun) was built by Palladio to commemorate the end of the great plague in 1577. It's on the southern island of Giudecca.

Guarding the entrance to the Grand Canal, the 17th century **Chiesa di Santa Maria della Salute** (☎ 041 522 55 58; Campo della Salute 1/b; sacristy admission €1.50; ☎ 9am-noon & 3.30-6pm) contains works by Tintoretto and Titian, arguably the greatest of Venice's artists. His masterpiece, the **Assunta** (Assumption, 1518), hangs in the **Chiesa di Santa Maria Glorioso dei Frari** (Campo dei Frari, San Polo 3004; admission €2.50; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 1-6pm Sun), the same church in which he's buried.

The Gothic **Chiesa dei SS Giovanni e Paolo** (☎ 041 523 59 13; Campo SS Giovanni e Paolo; admission €2.50; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mon-Sat & 1-7pm Sun), is famous for its 15th-century stained-glass window, the largest in Venice.

THE LIDO

Guarding Venice from the Adriatic Sea, the Lido is a thin strip of land that divides the lagoon from the open sea. Unless you're on the Lido for the Venice Film Festival, the main reason to visit here is for the beach. Be warned, though, that it gets impossibly crowded during the summer months. The Lido's accessible by vaporetto 1, LN, 51, 52, 61 and 62.

ISLANDS

Murano is the home of Venetian glass and **Burano**, with its cheery pastel-coloured houses, is renowned for its lace. **Torcello**, the republic's original island settlement, was abandoned due to malaria and now counts no more than 80 residents. Torcello's Byzantine cathedral, **Santa Maria Assunta** (☎ 041 270 24 64; Piazza Torcello; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am-6pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), is the oldest cathedral in Venice.

Vaporetto LN services the islands from the vaporetto station at Fondamente Nuove in the northeast of the city.

Activities

If you gotta go, be prepared to pay – official rates for a **gondola** start at €73 (€91 from 8pm to 8am) for a 50-minute ride. Rates are per gondola (licensed for six people).

Festivals & Events

Carnevale Masked rbalry in Venice's ritzy knees-up in the 10 days before Ash Wednesday.

Palio delle Quattro Repubbliche Marinare Venice, Amalfi, Genoa and Pisa take turns to host this historic regatta. It's in Venice in June 2007.

Festa del Redentore Celebrations on the third weekend in July culminate in a spectacular fireworks display.

Regata Storica Costumed parades precede gondola races on the Grand Canal; on the first Sunday in September.

Venice Biennale A major, year-long exhibition of international visual arts staged every even-numbered year.

Venice International Film Festival Italy's top film fest is held on the Lido every September.

Sleeping

Ouch! Prices in Venice hurt. It's always advisable to book ahead but essential at weekends, in May and September, and during Carnevale and other holidays.

Marina di Venezia (☎ 041 530 25 11; www.marinadi-venezia.it; Via Montello 6, Punta Sabbioni; per person/rent €9/24.40; ☎ mid-Apr-end Sep; ☒) On the Litorale de Cavallino, this large self-sufficient camping ground offers a long list of facilities including a shop, swimming pool and wi-fi. Take the vaporetto from Punta Sabbioni to Fondamenta Nuove.

Ostello Santa Fosca (☎ 041 71 57 75; www.santafosca.it; Cannaregio 2372; dm €19, d with shared bathroom per person €22) These student digs are the only place in town where, for less than €20, you can sunbathe in an enclosed garden before retiring to your dormitory for the night. Save €2 with a Rolling Venice card.

Foresteria Valdese (☎ 041 528 67 97; www.diaconia-valdese.org/venezia; Castello 5170; dm incl breakfast €22, d €78, with shared bathroom €62; ☒) Run by the Waldensian and Methodist Church, and housed in a rambling old mansion, this is a popular, well-run hostel. Follow Calle Lunga from Campo Santa Maria Formosa.

Ostello di Venezia (☎ 041 523 82 11; venezia@ostellionline.org; Fondamenta delle Zitelle 86; dm incl breakfast €19.50) Venice's charmless HI hostel is over the water from Piazza San Marco on the island of Giudecca. Take vaporetto 41, 42 or 82 from the train station, alighting at Zitelle.

Casa Gerotto & Alloggi Calderan (☎ 041 71 55 62; www.casagerottocalderan.com; Campo San Geremia 283; dm/s/d/tr €21/46/88/90, s/d with shared bathroom €36/65) This is a rough-round-the-edges *pensione-cum-hostel* with a range of anonymous rooms, many of which look over the square outside.

Casa Peron (☎ 041 71 10 21; www.casaperon.com; Salizada San Pantalon, San Polo 84; s/d €85/95, with shared bathroom €48/78) If all you're after is a crash pad near Campo Santa Margherita, this'll do. Outside noise can be a pain – unless you like being woken up at 5am by shouting workmen.

Hotel Minerva & Nettuno (☎ 041 71 59 68; www.minervaenettuno.it; Lista di Spagna, Cannaregio 230; s/d/tr €50/100/150, with shared bathroom €40/70/105; ☒ ☒) Stay here and do your bit for the environment. All the mod cons in the antique-laden Venetian rooms are fired by electricity produced from renewable sources.

Hotel Alex (☎ 041 523 13 41; www.hotelalexinvenice.com; Rio Terà, San Polo 2606; d incl breakfast €100, s/d with shared bathroom €48/74) In a quiet spot near Campo dei Frari, this welcoming *pensione* has modest, unfussy rooms spread over three floors (no lift).

Hotel Santa Lucia (☎ 041 71 51 80; www.hotelslucia.com; Calle della Misericordia, Cannaregio 358; s/d incl breakfast €80/110, with shared bathroom €60/85; ☒ ☒) About 200m from the train station, the Santa Lucia is a dependable option with helpful English-speaking staff, an attractive gravelled garden and airy rooms.

Hotel Bernardi Semenzato (☎ 041 522 72 57; www.hotelbernardi.com; SS Apostoli Calle dell'Oca, Cannaregio 4366; s €62-112, d €65-115, with shared bathroom s €38-72, d €44-72) A top choice boasting a great location (just off the station-to-San Marco thoroughfare), smart rooms and hospitable owners. Further rooms are available at a nearby annex.

Hotel ai Do Mori (☎ 041 520 48 17; www.hotelaido-mori.com; Calle Larga San Marco 658; s €45-100, d €60-140; ☒ ☒) Up some alarmingly steep stairs (three floors, no lift) rooms are simple, cosy and carpeted. Pick of the bunch is room 11 with a private terrace and views of San Marco. Discounts for cash payment.

Eating

At Venetian prices you'll be glad of the many affordable self-catering/snack options. For a sit-down meal, avoid the obvious tourist-traps near the big landmarks and duck down the side streets.

Venetian specialities include *risi e bisi* (pea soup thickened with rice), *sarde di saor* (fried sardines marinated in vinegar and onions) and *fragolino* (a fragrant strawberry flavoured wine).

QUICK EATS

All'Arco (☎ 041 520 56 66; Calle dell'Arco, San Polo 436; panini €3.50; ☎ 7.30am-9pm Mon-Sat) Popular with locals, this tiny *osteria* serves wonderful, fresh *panini*, a range of *cicheti* (bar snacks) and smooth wine by the glass.

Il Doge (☎ 041 523 46 07; Campo Santa Margherita, Dorsoduro 3058/a; ice cream €2; ☎ 10-2am Feb-Nov) A sweet gelateria on Campo Santa Margherita.

Il Laboratorio (☎ 340 600 79 74; Castello 6672; snacks from €1.80) This characterless neon-lit takeaway serves some of the best fried nibbles in Venice. Try the *arancini* (fried rice balls stuffed with ragù) and you'll get the idea.

Pizza al Volo (☎ 041 522 54 30; Campo Santa Margherita, Dorsoduro 2944; pizza from €4; ☎ 11.30am-4pm & 5pm-1.30am) Many a drinking session has been interrupted by a brief pizza-stop here. Slices are sail-sized and the family pizzas just that – enough for three or four.

Rosa Salva (☎ 041 522 79 49; Campo SS Giovanni e Paolo, Castello 6779; ☎ Thu-Tue) Stop by this historic café for sensational *fritalle* (fried pastry puffs filled with zabaglione or cream). Then pop next door to the gelateria for an ice cream.

RESTAURANTS

Vino Vino (☎ 041 523 70 27; Calle della Veste, San Marco 2007; 1st/2nd courses €6/10; ☎ 10.30am-midnight Wed-Mon) An atmospheric *osteria* with a daily menu of local fare and a 350-label wine list. Seafood is a regular on the blackboard and is usually very good.

ADMISSION DISCOUNTS

The **Rolling Venice Card** (€3) is for those aged 14 to 29; it offers discounts on food, accommodation, shopping, transport and museums. You can get it at tourist offices, public transport ticket offices and Vela information/ticket stands. You'll need your passport and a colour photograph.

The **Venice Card** (☎ 041 24 24; www.venicecard.it; aged under 29 1/3/7 days €18/35/61, over 29 €28/47/68) entitles holders to discounts on museums, public transport, car parks and restrooms. It doesn't always represent a saving, so check before buying.

To visit the museums on Piazza San Marco you'll need to buy a **Museum Pass** (☎ 041 240 52 11; www.museicivichevneziani.it; adult/students aged 15-29 €15.50/10), which grants admission to 11 museums; or the **Museum Card** (€11/5.50), which covers fewer sights. Both are available at participating museums.

The **Chorus Pass** (☎ 041 275 04 62; www.chorusvenezia.org; adult/student €9/6) covers admission to 15 of Venice's major churches. Otherwise entry to each church is €2.50.

Ae Oche (☎ 041 524 11 61; Calle del Tintor, Santa Croce 1552a/b; pizzas/1st/2nd courses from €5/6/8) A hybrid of Tex-Mex décor and Italian food, this is one of Venice's busiest *pizzerie*. You'll find all the usual toppings plus a range of pastas and meat courses.

Antica Trattoria Bandierette (☎ 041 522 06 19; Castello 6671; 1st/2nd courses €7/9; ☎ closed Mon dinner & Tue) An unassuming neighbourhood trattoria known for its excellent seafood. The menu depends on the day's catch but for non-fish eaters there's a selection of fail-safe pastas and mains.

La Zucca (☎ 041 524 15 70; Calle del Tentor, Santa Croce 1762; 1st/2nd courses from €7/12.50; ☎ Mon-Sat) A wonderful, unpretentious little restaurant in an out-of-the-way spot, 'The Pumpkin' serves a range of innovative dishes prepared with fresh, seasonal ingredients. Bookings recommended.

Osteria ai 4 Ferri (☎ 041 520 69 78; Calle Lunga San Barnaba, Dorsoduro 2754/a; 1st/2nd courses €9/15; ☎ Mon-Sat) Run by a young crew, the 4 Ferri (4 Irons) enjoys a deserved reputation for top-notch seafood. There's spaghetti *con il nero di seppia* (with cuttlefish ink) and grilled tuna, *baccalà* and bream – all of it swimming in flavour. Reservations required.

SELF-CATERING

For fruit and veg, as well as deli items, head for the markets near the Rialto bridge, or on the Rio Terrà San Leonardo. There are also several supermarkets: **Punto Sma** (Campo Santa Margherita), **Billa** (Strada Nova, Cannaregio 3660) and **Coop** (Fondamenta di Santa Chiara, Piazzale Roma 506a).

Drinking

Venice's drinking scene is concentrated on and around Campo Santa Margherita.

Café Blue (☎ 041 71 02 27; Salizzata San Pantalon, Dorsoduro 3778; ☎ Mon-Sat) The most pub-like of Venice's trinity of 'coloured cafés' (*rosso*, blue and noir), Café Blue is a dark, woody spot for a pint or two in like-minded company. Free Internet is a cool bonus.

Café Noir (☎ 041 71 09 25; Calle San Pantalon 3805) A mixed crowd of tourists, trendies and bohemians hang out at the Café Noir. During the day you can grab a coffee and read the paper; at night the funk goes on the stereo, the volume rises and the windows steam up.

Chet Baker (☎ 041 523 87 27; Campo Santa Margherita, Dorsoduro 3684) A small den of a bar, Chet Baker would be the archetypal smoky jazz joint if smoking were not banned in public places. It still manages to catch the mood with a cool jazz soundtrack and a welcoming vibe. DJs on Wednesday, Friday and Saturday nights.

Il Caffè (☎ 041 528 79 98; Campo Santa Margherita, Dorsoduro 2963) A favourite of international students, Il Caffè is better known as Café Rosso because of its red frontage. Good-looking bar staff serve a mean *sprizze* (an aperitif of *prosecco*, soda and a bitter mixer).

Orange (☎ 041 523 47 40; Campo Santa Margherita, Dorsoduro 3054) The latest addition to Campo Santa Margherita's buzzing bar scene, Orange sports a contemporary look – bright orange walls, surrealist Miró prints, MTV – and a young, multinational crowd.

Paradiso Perduto (☎ 041 72 05 81; Fondamenta della Misericordia, Cannaregio 2540; ☎ Tue-Sun) Queer-friendly and flamboyant, this restaurant-cum-club heats up late but when the DJs ratchet up the decibels it jives. There's live music most weekends, often jazz, and a full food menu (1st/2nd courses €10/15).

Torrefazione Costarica (☎ 041 716 371; Strada Nuovo, Cannaregio 1337) Connoisseurs come here for Venice's best, and cheapest, coffee (espresso €0.70, cappuccino €1.10).

Entertainment

Tickets for most events are available from **Vela** (☎ 041 24 24; www.hellovenezia.it) kiosks in front of the train station, at Piazzale Roma and at the Venice Pavilion tourist office.

Gran Teatro La Fenice (☎ 041 78 6511; www.teatrolafenice.it; Campo San Fantin, San Marco 1977; tickets from €20) One of Italy's most important opera houses, the Fenice was destroyed by fire in 1996. It's now back in full swing after reopening in 2003.

Shopping

Classic gift options include Murano glass, lace from Burano, Carnevale masks and *carta marmorizzata* (marbled paper). There are any number of shops selling these but for the best deal go to the source. Note, however, that genuine Burano lace is expensive and much of the cheaper stuff is imported from the Far East.

The main shopping area is between San Marco and the Rialto; for designer clobber head to the area west of Piazza San Marco.

Utz (☎ 360 32 53 33; Castello 6400) Named after a Bruce Chatwin book, Utz is an Aladdin's cave of antique jewellery, glass, furniture and odds and ends. Prices are accessible if not cheap.

Getting There & Away

Most European and domestic flights land at **Marco Polo airport** (code VCE; ☎ 041 260 92 60; www.veniceairport.it), 12km outside Venice. Ryanair, however, flies to **Treviso airport** (code TSF; ☎ 0422 31 51 11; www.trevisoairport.it), about 30km from Venice.

Minoan Lines (☎ 041 240 71 01; www.minoan.gr) run ferries to Corfu (22 hours), Igoumenitsa (23½ hours) and Patras (€75, 29½ hours) daily in summer and four times a week in winter.

ACTV (☎ 041 24 24; www.actv.it) buses service surrounding areas, including Mestre, Padua and Treviso. Tickets and information are available at the **bus station** in Piazzale Roma.

The train station, **Stazione Santa Lucia**, is directly linked to Padua (€2.50, 40 minutes, three or four hourly), Verona (€12.50, 1½ hours, half hourly) and Bologna (€15, two hours, half hourly), and is easily accessible from Rome and Florence. It also goes to France, Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Slovenia and Croatia.

Getting Around

The city's main mode of public transport are *vaporetti*. Useful routes are:

LN From Fondamenta Nuove to Murano, Burano and the Lido.

T Runs between Burano and Torcello.

No 1 From Piazzale Roma to the train station and down the Grand Canal to San Marco and the Lido.

No 17 Car ferry between Tronchetto and the Lido.

No 82 All stops on the Grand Canal plus Piazzale Roma, Tronchetto and Giudecca.

Tickets, available at landing stations and Vela outlets, are expensive: €5 for 90 minutes unlimited travel or €10.50/22 for 24/72 hours.

To cross the Grand Canal where there's no nearby bridge take a *traghetto* (public gondola; €0.50 per crossing).

FERRARA

pop 131,135

Ferrara retains much of the austere splendour of its Renaissance heyday, when, as seat of the Este family (1260–1598), it was a force to be reckoned with. Overshadowed by Castello Estense, the medieval centre is atmospheric.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0532 29 93 03; www.ferrara.info .com; ☎ 9am–1pm & 2–6pm Mon–Sat, 9.30am–1pm & 2–5pm Sun) is inside Castello Estense.

Sights & Activities

Easily explored on foot, Ferrara's *centro storico* lies to the south of **Castello Estense** (☎ 0532 29 92 33; Viale Cavour; admission €6, plus €1 for the Lion's Tower; ☎ 9.30am–5.30pm). Complete with moat and drawbridges, it was begun by Nicolò II d'Este in 1385 and became the Este family's residence.

Nearby, the 12th-century **Duomo** (☎ 0532 20 74 49; Piazza Cattedrale; ☎ 7.30am–noon & 3–6.30pm Mon–Sat, 7.30am–12.30pm & 3.30–7.30pm Sun), with a superb three-tiered façade, is more interesting outside than in. The cathedral **museum** (☎ 0532 24 49 49; Via San Romano 1–9; admission €5; ☎ 9.30am–1pm & 3–8pm Tue–Sun) exhibits some attractive Renaissance sculptures and paintings.

Palazzo Schifanoia (☎ 0532 24 49 49; Via Scandiana 23; adult/under-18s €5/free; ☎ 9am–6pm Tue–Sun) is one of Ferrara's earliest Renaissance buildings and another Este palace. In the **Sala dei Mesi** (Room of the Months) the 15th-century frescoes are considered among the best examples of their type in Italy. Sadly, they're not in great nick.

Sleeping

You won't need to overnight to see Ferrara's sights, but it's a cheap alternative to Bologna and a possible base for Venice.

Campeggio Estense (☎ 0532 75 23 96; campeggio.estense@libero.it; Via Gramiccia 76; per person/tent €5/7.50) For Ferrara's only camping ground, take bus 1 or 5 from the train station to Piazzale San Giovanni and then follow the signs.

Pensione Artisti (☎ 0532 76 10 38; Via Vittoria 66; d €60, s/d with shared bathroom €25/43) The best budget option in town. Its scrubbed white rooms sparkle, the central location is convenient for everything, there are kitchen facilities and the owners are super-friendly.

Eating & Drinking

Trattoria Il Mandolino (☎ 0532 76 00 80; Via Carlo Mayr 83; 1st/2nd courses €8/10) Taking its name from the mandolin on the wall, this tastefully cluttered

trattoria serves tasty local food. The house speciality is *salama da sugo con puré* (salty braised salami on a bed of mashed potato).

Fusion (☎ 0532 20 14 73; Via Delle Scienze 8/a) Dress up to avoid being outsmarted by Fusion's glam furniture. Red leather stools, cream sofas and industrial piping provide the setting for Ferrara's sexy, self-conscious drinkers. Great fun.

Messisbugo (☎ 0532 76 40 60; Via Carlo Mayr 79; ☎ Tue–Sun) Despite a name that suggests Tex-Mex tack, Mesisbugo is a cool, brick-vaulted bar. Friendly staff, great wines and a laid-back vibe.

Getting There & Around

There are regular trains to Bologna (€7.85, 40 minutes, half hourly) Venice (€13, 1½ hours, every 45 minutes or so) and Ravenna (€4.30, 1½ hours, 17 daily).

From the station take bus 1 or 9 for the historic centre.

BOLOGNA

pop 373,540

A university town since 1088 (Europe's oldest), Bologna is worth a few days of anyone's time – not so much for its specific attractions, of which there are few, but for the sheer fun of its animated, arcaded streets. And with hundreds of bars, cafés and *trattorie* to choose from, you'll soon find somewhere to hang out.

Traditionally a bastion of Italian socialism – it's often joked that its politics are reflected in the red buildings – Bologna is famous for its food; most notably, for bolognese sauce or, as it's known locally, *ragù*.

Orientation & Information

Via dell'Indipendenza, the main north–south artery, leads from the train and bus stations into Piazza del Nettuno and Piazza Maggiore, the heart of the city.

Liongate Internet Point (www.liongate.it; 1st fl,

Via Rizzoli 9, cnr Galleria del Leone; per hr €2;

☎ 10am–midnight)

Ospedale Maggiore (☎ 051 647 81 11)

Police station (Questura; ☎ 051 640 11 11; Piazza Galileo 7)

Post office (Piazza Minghetti 1)

Tourist information (☎ 051 24 65 41; www.bolognaturismo.info); Piazza Maggiore 1 (☎ 9am–8pm); train station (☎ 8.30am–7pm Mon–Sat); airport (☎ 8am–8pm Mon–Sat, 9am–3pm Sun)

GETTING INTO TOWN

Getting to the centre of town from Guglielmo Marconi airport is easy. Every 20 minutes an **Aerobus shuttle** (€4.50, 30 minutes) runs to the main train station. From Forlì airport, **buses** (www.e-bus.it; €10) leave shortly after Ryanair flights land, headed to Bologna train station. To get to the centre from the train station take bus 21 or 30.

Sights & Activities

Bologna's porticoed *centro storico* is an atmospheric place to wander through. Start in pedestrianised **Piazza Maggiore** and adjoining **Piazza del Nettuno**. Here you'll find the **Fontana del Nettuno** (Neptune's Fountain), sculpted by Giambologna in 1566 and featuring an impressively muscled Neptune.

Dedicated to the city's patron saint, the Gothic **Basilica di San Petronio** (☎ 051 22 54 22; Piazza Maggiore; ☎ 7.30am–1pm & 2.30–6pm) is the world's fifth-largest basilica. Note the partially complete façade and, inside, the 17th-century brass sundial along the eastern aisle. Nearby, **Palazzo Comunale** (Town Hall; ☎ 051 20 31 11; Piazza Maggiore; admission free) is home to the city's art collection.

It's a short walk to **Piazza di Porta Ravegnana** and Bologna's two leaning towers, the **Due Torri**. The taller of the two, the 97m **Torre Asinelli** (€3; ☎ 9am–6pm), was built between 1109 and 1119 and is now open to the public.

The **Basilica di San Domenico** (☎ 051 640 04 11; Piazza San Domenico; ☎ 7.30am–1pm & 3.30–7.30pm) is worth a look for San Domenico's elaborate sarcophagus. Standing in the 12th-century Capella di San Domenico, it was designed by Nicolò Pisano and later added to by Michelangelo.

Sleeping

Budget hotels are in perpetual demand and not as cheap as you'd expect in a student city.

Ostello Due Torri/San Sisto (☎ 051 50 18 10; hostelbologna@hotmail.com; Via Viadagola 5; dm €15.50) It's a pain to get to Bologna's two standard HI hostels 6km north of the city centre. Take bus 93 (Monday to Saturday daytime), 301 (Sunday) or 21b (daily after 8.30pm) from Via Irnerio or Via Marconi.

Albergo Panorama (☎ 051 22 1802; www.hotelpanoramabologna.it; 4th fl, Via Livraghi 1; s/d/tr/q with

shared bathroom €60/75/85/95) Make it up to the 4th floor and you'll find a lovely, family-run *pensione*. Jolly corridors lead to bright, spacious rooms, some of which have views of Bologna's towers.

Albergo Garisenda (☎ 051 22 4369; www.albergo.garisenda.com; Via Rizzoli 9, Galleria del Leone 1; d incl breakfast €110, s/d with shared bathroom €60/85) In the shadow of the towers, the 3rd-floor Garisenda offers seven nondescript rooms with beds, lights and not a lot else. Beds are comfy though and the shared bathrooms are clean.

Eating & Drinking

The university area around Via Rizzoli harbours hundreds of *trattorie* and restaurants.

Trattoria Mariposa (☎ 051 22 56 56; Via Bertiera 12; 1st/2nd courses €6/7; ☎ closed Mon, Thu dinner & Sun) The convivial Mariposa draws a young crowd thanks to its down-to-earth cooking and honest prices. If they're on, go for the *garganelli con pancetta e rucola* (short pasta with pancetta and rocket).

Ourpick Trattoria da Danio (☎ 051 55 52 02; Via San Felice 50a; 1st/2nd courses €8/9, menu €11.50) With the TV on in the corner and the jovial owner chatting to his mates at the bar, this is the quintessential Italian trattoria. Not much to look at, it's perfect for unpretentious Bolognese food (compare the real *ragù* with your own) and cheap local wine. Save yourself a euro or two and go for the excellent-value set menu.

Rosa Rose Bistro (☎ 051 22 50 71; Via Clavature 18; pastas/salads €7.50/7) A swell café with fake zebra-skin wallpaper, outdoor seating under medieval timbers, and great salads. Also pastas and risottos.

SPLURGE

A model of exquisite taste, the **Hotel de Prati** (☎ 0532 24 19 05; www.hoteldeprati.com; Via Padiglioni 5; s/d €75/110; ☎) has got it exactly right. Not an antique desk or a contemporary print looks out of place in the big, beautifully decorated rooms. Styles vary but the best sport a classical Italian look – terracotta floor tiles, wrought-iron bedsteads and original 17th-century timber ceilings (on the 1st floor). Downstairs, the yellow and orange walls stage entertaining art exhibitions.

Cantina Bentivoglio (☎ 051 26 54 16; Via Mascarella 4b; 1st/2nd courses €8/10; ☎ 8pm-2am) Music-loving *bon viveurs* will dig this place. There's nightly jazz, a mega wine list and regional food – all in the heart of the rocking university quarter.

Clorofilla (☎ 051 235 53 43; Strada Maggiore 64/c; main courses €6.50; ☎ Mon-Sat) In the town that put meat sauce on the menu, a vegetarian restaurant is a real find. Clorofilla is a relaxed café-style eatery good for salads, couscous and tofu.

SELF-CATERING

Self caterers can stock up at the covered **Mercato Ugo Bassi** (Via Ugo Bassi 27; ☎ Mon-Sat). If not, there's a supermarket **Pam** (☎ 051 52 04 04; Via Marconi 28a) for staples, or deli **La Baita** (Via Pescheria Vecchie) for gourmet fare.

Drinking & Clubbing

Cluricaune (☎ 051 26 34 19; Via Zamboni 18/b) A big Irish pub with all the predictable Guinness paraphernalia and premiership football on the TV. Needless to say it is very popular with students.

Corto Maltese (☎ 051 22 97 46; Via del Borgo San Pietro 9/A) Tank up during happy hour (9pm to 10.30pm) in time for the commercial tunes the DJs spin on Friday and Saturday nights. There's dancing, pasta and even a pool table.

Kinki (☎ 051 587 51 78; Via Zamboni 1) It's hot! It's vinyl! Guys, lesbians and über-cool straights are welcome to work it until all hours at Bologna's most famous disco. Themed nights, top DJs, wicked sounds.

Getting There & Around

Guglielmo Marconi airport (code BLQ; ☎ 051 647 96 15; www.bologna-airport.it) is 6km northwest of the city. Ryanair now flies to **Forlì airport** (code FRL; ☎ 0543 47 49 21; www.forli-airport.it), 70km southeast of Bologna.

Bologna is a major rail hub. From the **train station** (Piazza delle Medaglie d'Oro) trains run to Venice (€15, two hours, half hourly), Florence (€11, one hour, every 20 min) and Rome (Eurostar, €37, 2¼hrs, hourly). National and international coaches depart from the main **bus station** (Piazza XX Settembre).

RAVENNA

pop 139,000

A smart, staid town, Ravenna is best visited on a day trip. Once you've seen the remarkable Unesco-protected mosaics – relics of

its golden age as the capital of the Western Roman Empire and the western seat of the Byzantines – you've pretty much done the sights. Dante wrote much of the *Divine Comedy* here after being expelled from Florence in 1302.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0544 354 04; www.turismo.ravenna.it; Via Salara 8; ☎ 8.30am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-4pm Sun) is in the *centro storico*.

You'll find Ravenna's main **mosaics** (€7.50 for all venues; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, shorter hr Oct-Mar) in the **Basilica di Sant'Appollinare Nuovo** (☎ 0544 21 95 18; Via di Roma), **Basilica di San Vitale** (☎ 0544 21 51 93; Via Fiandrin), **Mausoleo di Galla Placidia** (☎ 0544 21 51 93; Via Fiandrin) and **Battistero Neoniano** (Via Battistero). The entrance ticket also covers the **Museo Arcivescovile** (☎ 0544 21 52 91; Piazza Arcivescovado; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, shorter hours Oct-Mar).

There are more mosaics (some of the best, in fact) in the **Basilica di Sant'Appollinare in Classe** (☎ 0544 47 35 69; Via Romea Sud, Classe; admission €2; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 1-7.30pm Sun), 5km out of town. Take bus 4 from Piazza Caduti per la Libertà.

Dante spent the last 19 years of his life in Ravenna after he was expelled from Florence. As a perpetual act of penance Florence supplies the oil for the lamp that burns in his **tomb** (Via Dante Alighieri 9; admission free; ☎ 9am-7pm).

Stello Dante (☎ 0544 42 11 64; Via Aurelio Nicolodi 12; dm incl breakfast €16) has Ravenna's cheapest beds. This spruce HI hostel is 1km out of town; take bus 1 from Viale Pallavacini, by the train station.

Albergo Al Giaciglio (☎ 0544 394 03; www.albergoalgiaciglio.com; Via Rocca Brancaleone 42; s/d €43/65, with shared bathroom €38/50), near the station, is a welcoming family-run hotel with modest rooms and a good restaurant (meat/vegetarian menu €13/15).

Bizantino (Piazza Andrea Costa; 1st/2nd courses €3/4.50; ☎ lunch Mon-Fri) is a self-service canteen with decent pastas and a daily choice of main courses. It's located inside the covered market, itself a good place to grab a fresh *panino*.

Trains connect with Bologna (€7 to €15, 1½ hours, hourly) and Ferrara (€4.30, 1½ hours, 17 daily).

In town, cycling is a popular mode of transport. You can rent bikes from **Cooperativa Sociale la Formica** (☎ 0544 370 31; Piazza Farini; per hr/day €1/7.75; ☎ 7am-8pm Mon-Sat) outside the train station, or the **tourist office** (free; ☎ spring & summer only).

THE DOLOMITES

Stretching across Trentino-Alto Adige and into the Veneto, the stabbing sawtooth peaks of the Dolomites provide some of Italy's most thrilling scenery. With their jagged silhouettes and colourful tints (blue-grey turning to red, then purple as the sun sets) they are popular year-round – in winter for the skiing, in summer for the superb hiking.

Resorts range from posh Cortina d'Ampezzo to more approachable resorts in the Val Gardena. Ski passes cover either single resorts or a combination of slopes; the most comprehensive is the **Superski Dolomiti pass** (www.dolomitisuperski.com; high season 3/6 days €110/194) which accesses 464 lifts and 1220km of runs in 12 valleys.

Hiking opportunities run the gamut from gentle strolls to hard-core mountain treks. Recommended areas include the **Alpe di Siusi** – a vast plateau above the Val Gardena; **Cortina and environs**; and **Pale di San Martino**, accessible from San Martino di Castrozza.

Information

Information on Trentino-Alto-Adige can be obtained in Trent at the **tourist office** (☎ 0461 98 38 80; www.ap.trento.it; Via Mancini 2; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat) or the **Trentino Tourist Board** (☎ 800 010 545, 0461 83 90 00; www.trentino.to; Via Romagnosi 11). In Bolzano, the **tourist office** (☎ 0471 30 70 00; www.bolzano-bozen.it; Piazza Walther 8; ☎ 9am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, 9am-12.30pm Sat) can also help. For the Veneto ask at the **tourist office** (☎ 0436 32 31; www.infodolomiti.it; Piazzetta San Francesco 8; ☎ 9am-12.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm) in Cortina d'Ampezzo. The best online resource is www.dolomiti.org.

Getting There & Around

In Trentino-Alto Adige, **Bolzano airport** (code BZO; 0471 25 52 55; www.abd-airport.it) is served by a couple of European flights. Otherwise the nearest airports are Verona-Villafranca (see p656) or Orio al Serio near Bergamo (see p654).

On terra firma, the area's excellent bus network is run by **Trentino Trasporti** (☎ 0461 82 10 00; www.ttspa.it, in Italian) in Trentino; **SAD** (☎ 800 84 60 47; www.sil.bz.it) in Alto Adige; and **Dolomiti Bus** (www.dolomitibus.it, in Italian) in the Veneto. During winter, most resorts offer 'ski bus' services.

The main towns and ski resorts can be reached directly from Rome, Florence, Venice, Bologna, Milan and Genoa. Tourist offices and regional bus stations have more information.

WARNING

Even in summer the weather is extremely changeable in the Alps; though it may be sweltering when you set off, be prepared for cold, wet weather on even the shortest walks. Essentials include good-quality, worn-in walking boots, a waterproof jacket, warm hat and gloves, light food, plenty of water and a decent map. The best are the *Tabacco* 1:25,000 series, widely available in the area.

CANAZEI

pop 1855

Canazei is great for serious skiers. It's got 120km of downhill and cross-country runs and is linked to the challenging **Sella Ronda** network; there's even summer skiing on the Marmolada, the Dolomites' highest peak (3342m).

Spend a cheap night at the **Marmolada camping ground** (☎ 0462 60 16 60; per person/tent €9.50/9.50; ☎ year-round), or contact the **tourist office** (☎ 0462 60 11 13; www.fassa.com; Piazza Marconi 5; ☎ 8.30am-12.15pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-12.30pm Sun) for accommodation lists.

Canazei is accessible by Trentino Trasporti bus from Trent (€5.30, 2½ hours, three daily).

VAL GARDENA

The Val Gardena offers top-notch facilities at affordable prices. In summer, hikers throng to the Sella Group and the Alpe di Siusi for rugged, high-altitude treks, other hikers head to the Vallunga for some more accessible walks.

The valley's main towns are Ortisei, Santa Cristina and Selva, all offering plenty of accommodation and easy access to runs. Further information is available online at www.gardena.org, or from the towns' tourist offices:

Ortisei (☎ 0471 79 63 28; Via Rezia 1; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-noon & 5-6.30pm Sun)

Santa Cristina (☎ 0471 79 30 46; Via Chemun 9; ☎ 8am-noon & 2.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-noon Sun)

Selva (☎ 0471 79 51 22; Via Mëisules 213; ☎ 8am-noon & 3-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-noon & 5-6.30pm Sun)

The Val Gardena is accessible from Bolzano by SAD bus service and from Canazei in the summer.

SAN MARTINO DI CASTROZZA

pop 700

This resort is at the foot of the Pale di San Martino range. The **tourist office** (☎ 0439 76 88 67; www.sanmartino.com; Via Passo Rolle 165; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-12.30pm Sun) can help with accommodation and skiing/hiking.

Hotel Garni Madonna (☎ 0439 681 37; www.hotelmadonna.it; Via Passo Rolle 72; B&B per person €35-60) is a central hotel with 25 comfortable rooms and some picturesque views of the summits.

Trentino Trasporti buses run to/from Trent (€5.60, 2½ hours, four daily).

CENTRAL ITALY

Central Italy's rolling countryside has long been considered the embodiment of rural chic, its gentle valleys and hilltop towns a favourite of well-to-do second-homers. Florence and Tuscany steal the show, but away from the crowds it's still possible to lose yourself down a medieval side street in Umbria and lesser-known Le Marche.

FLORENCE (FIRENZE)

pop 367,260

Florence has a strange effect on visitors. Travellers who normally loathe art galleries queue for hours to get into them, and people with no interest in Renaissance architecture start raving about tiered façades and frescoed apses. But break the spell and you'll find that Florence can be disheartening. Much of the centre has been surrendered to tourism and in summer the heat, pollution and crowds can be stifling. That said, it remains a charismatic city you'd be sorry to miss. The list of its famous sons reads like a Renaissance *Who's Who* – under M alone you'll find Medici, Machiavelli and Michelangelo – and it's celebrated cityscape lingers in the memory long after you've left town.

History

Many hold that Florentia was founded by Julius Caesar around 59 BC, but archaeological evidence suggests an earlier village, possibly established by the Etruscans around 200 BC. A rich merchant city by the 12th century, Florence grew into a powerful city-state under the Medici family, its cultural, artistic and political fecundity culminating in the 15th-century Renaissance.

The Medici were succeeded in the 18th century by the French House of Lorraine, which ruled until 1860 when the city was incorporated into the Kingdom of Italy, presiding as capital between 1865 and 1870.

Florence's recent past has been explosive: during WWII bombs destroyed all of the city's bridges except for Ponte Vecchio; in 1966, a flood damaged many important works of art; then, in 1993, a Mafia car bomb killed five people and wrecked part of the Uffizi Gallery.

Orientation

From Santa Maria Novella train station, it's a 550m walk along Via de' Panzani and Via de' Cerretani to the Duomo. Once here, Via Roma leads down to Piazza della Repubblica and Via de' Calzaiuoli connects with Piazza della Signoria. Most major sights are within comfortable walking distance of the Duomo.

Information

BOOKSHOPS

Feltrinelli International (Map p674; ☎ 055 21 95 24; Via Cavour 12r) Great selection of books in English.

Paperback Exchange (Map p674; ☎ 055 29 34 60; Via delle Oche 4r) New and second-hand books in English.

EMERGENCY

Police station (Questura; Map p671; ☎ 055 497 71; Via Zara 2)

INTERNET ACCESS

Internet Train (per hr about €4; ☎ 10am-8pm Mon-Fri, 11am-8pm Sat & Sun; Via dell'Oriuolo 40r (Map p674); Borgo San Jacopo 30r (Map p674); Stazione Santa Maria Novella (Map p671) Opening times vary but are approximately as above.

Netgate (Map p671; Via Sant' Egidio 12r; per hr €2; ☎ 9am-11.30pm)

LAUNDRY

Wash & Dry (☎ 800 23 11 72; 8kg wash/dry €3.50/3.50; ☎ 8am-10pm) Via Nazionale 129r (Map p671); Via del Sole 29r (Map p674); Via della Scala 52-54r (Map p671); Via dei Servi 105r (Map p671); Via de' Serragli 87r (Map p671)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Farmacia Comunale (Map p671; ☎ 055 28 94 35; Stazione Santa Maria Novella; ☎ 24hr) Inside the train station.

Misericordia di Firenze (Map p674; ☎ 055 21 22 22; Vicolo degli Adimari 1, Piazza del Duomo; ☎ 2-6pm Mon-Fri Mar-Oct) Fee-paying medical service.

Tourist Medical Service (Map p671; ☎ 055 47 54 11; Via Lorenzo il Magnifico 59; ☎ 24hr)

FLORENCE

0 200 m
0 0.1 miles

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- Galleria dell'Accademia.....14 C3
- Galleria Palatina.....(see 16)
- Giardino di Boboli.....15 B6
- Museo degli Argenti.....(see 16)
- Palazzo Pitti.....16 B5

GETTING INTO TOWN

The main airport serving Florence is Pisa's Galileo Galilei airport. From here, **Terravision** (☎ 06 321 20 011; www.terravision.it) runs a bus service to Florence's main train station (Santa Maria Novella, €7.50, 70 minutes, 12 daily). **Lazzi** (☎ 050 462 88; www.lazzi.it, in Italian) buses also serve the city centre (€11.40, two hours, hourly), although they take a longer route via Lucca. Otherwise there are regular trains (€5.10, 1½ hours, hourly between 6.37am and 8.37pm).

From the smaller Amerigo Vespucci airport, the **Vola in Bus** (☎ 800 42 45 00; www.ataf.net) service connects to the SITA bus station (€4, 25 minutes, half-hourly 5.30am to 11pm).

MONEY

American Express (Map p674; ☎ 055 509 81; Via Dante Alighieri 22r; ☎ 9am-5.30pm Mon-Fri)

Travelex (Map p674; ☎ 055 28 97 81; Lungarno degli Acciaiuoli 6r; ☎ 9am-5.50pm Mon-Sat, 9.30am-4.50pm Sun)

POST & TELEPHONE

Post office (Map p674; Via Pellicceria 3)

Telecom office (Map p671; Via Cavour 21r; ☎ 7am-11pm) Public payphones.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Tourist offices Main office (Map p671; ☎ 055 29 08 32; www.firenzeturismo.it; Via Cavour 1r; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun); Piazza della Stazione 4 (Map p671; ☎ 055 21 22 45; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun); Borgo Santa Croce 29r (Map p671; ☎ 055 234 04 44; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun); Amerigo Vespucci airport (☎ 055 31 58 74; ☎ 7.30am-11.30pm daily)

Sights & Activities

You'll never avoid queuing in Florence, but by pre-booking museum tickets you'll be able to cut down the waiting. For €3 extra per museum you can book tickets for the Uffizi, Palazzo Pitti, Galleria dell'Accademia and Cappelle Medicee through **Firenze Musei** (☎ 055 29 48 83; www.firenzemusei.it; ☎ booking service 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat).

Entry to all state museums is free for EU citizens under 18 and over 65, and half price for those between 18 and 25. To claim the discount you'll need your passport.

PIAZZA DEL DUOMO & AROUND

One of the world's largest cathedrals, Florence's Gothic **Duomo** (Map p674; ☎ 055 230 28 85; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Wed & Fri, 10am-3.30pm Thu, 10am-4.45pm Sat, 1.30-4.45pm Sun) is quite an eyeful. Officially the Cattedrale di Santa Maria del Fiore, it was begun in 1294 by Siennese architect Arnolfo di Cambio and consecrated in 1436. Its most famous feature, the enormous octagonal

cupola (dome; admission €6; ☎ 8.30am-7pm Mon-Fri, to 5.40pm Sat), was built by Brunelleschi after his design won a public competition in 1420. The interior is decorated with frescoes by Vasari and Zuccari, and the stained-glass windows are by Donatello, Paolo Uccello and Lorenzo Ghiberti. The characteristic red, green and white marble façade is actually a 19th-century replacement of the unfinished original, pulled down in the 16th century.

Beside the cathedral, the 82m **Campanile** (Map p674; admission €6; ☎ 8.30am-6.50pm) was begun by Giotto in 1334 and completed after his death by Andrea Pisano and Francesco Talenti. The views from the top make the 414-step climb worthwhile.

The Romanesque **Battistero** (Baptistry; Map p674; Piazza di San Giovanni; admission €3; ☎ noon-7pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2pm Sun) is one of the oldest buildings in Florence and it was here that Dante was baptised. Built between the 5th and 11th centuries on the site of a Roman temple, it's famous for its gilded-bronze doors, particularly Lorenzo Ghiberti's *Gate of Paradise*. Andrea Pisano's south door (1336) is the oldest.

GALLERIA DEGLI UFFIZI (UFFIZI GALLERY)

Home to the world's greatest collection of Renaissance art, the **Galleria degli Uffizi** (Map p674; ☎ 055 238 86 51; www.uffizi.firenze.it; Piazza degli Uffizi 6; admission €6.50, audio guide €4.65; ☎ 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sun) attracts 1.5 million visitors annually. Unless you've booked a ticket (see Firenze Musei, left) expect to queue.

The gallery houses the Medici family collection, bequeathed to the city in 1743 on condition that it never leave the city. Highlights include *The Birth of Venus* and *Allegory of Spring* in the Botticelli rooms (10-14); Leonardo da Vinci's *Annunciation* (room 15), Michelangelo's *Holy Family* (room 25) and Titian's *Venus of Urbino* (room 28). Elsewhere you'll find works by Giotto, Cimabue,

Filippo Lippi, Fra Angelico, Paolo Uccello, Raphael, Andrea del Sarto, Tintoretto and Caravaggio.

PIAZZA DELLA SIGNORIA

Piazza della Signoria is dominated by **Palazzo Vecchio** (Map p674; ☎ 055 276 82 24; admission €6; ☎ 9am-7pm Fri-Wed, to 2pm Thu), the historical seat of the Florentine government. Characterised by the 94m **Torre d'Arnolfo**, it was designed by Arnolfo di Cambio and built between 1298 and 1340. Visit the Michelozzo courtyard and the lavish upstairs apartments.

To the south, the **Loggia della Signoria** (Map p674) is a 14th-century sculpture showcase. The statue of *David* is a copy of Michelangelo's original that stood here until 1873 but is now in the Galleria dell'Accademia (below).

PONTE VECCHIO

Lined with jewellery shops, the 14th-century **Ponte Vecchio** (Map p674) was originally flanked by butchers' shops. But when the Medici built a corridor through the bridge to link Palazzo Pitti with Palazzo Vecchio, they ordered that the butchers be replaced with goldsmiths.

PALAZZO PITTI

Built for the Pitti family, this vast 15th-century **palace** (Map p671) was bought by the Medici in 1549 as their family residence. Today it houses four museums, of which the **Galleria Palatina** (Palatine Gallery; Map p671; ☎ 055 238 86 14; admission incl Royal Apartments €6.50; ☎ 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sun) is the most important. Works by Raphael, Filippo Lippi, Titian and Rubens adorn lavishly decorated rooms and royal apartments. The other museums are the **Museo degli Argenti** (Silver Museum; Map p671; ☎ 055 238 87 09; admission €4; ☎ 8.15am-4.30pm Tue-Sun, 2nd & 3rd Mon each month), the **Galleria d'Arte Moderna** (Modern Art Gallery; Map p671; ☎ 055 238 86 16; admission €5; ☎ 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sat) and the **Galleria del Costume** (Costume Gallery; Map p671; ☎ 055 238 87 13; admission €5; ☎ 8.15am-1.50pm Tue-Sat).

Rising above the palace, the Renaissance **Giardino di Boboli** (Boboli Gardens; Map p671; admission €4; ☎ 8.15am-7.30pm Jun-Aug, to 6.30pm Apr, May, Sep & Oct, to 5.30pm Mar, to 4.30pm Jan, Feb, Nov & Dec) is well worth a wander.

GALLERIA DELL'ACCADEMIA

People queuing outside the **Galleria dell'Accademia** (Map p671; ☎ 055 238 86 09; Via Ricasoli 60; admission €6.50; ☎ 8.15am-6.50pm Tue-Sun) are waiting to see *David*, arguably the Western world's

most famous sculpture. Michelangelo carved the giant figure from a single block of marble, finishing it in 1504 when he was just 29.

BASILICA DI SAN LORENZO & CAPPELLE MEDICEE (MEDICI CHAPELS)

The Medici family church, the **Basilica di San Lorenzo** (Map p674; ☎ 055 264 51 84; Piazza San Lorenzo; admission €2.50; ☎ 10am-5pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5pm Sun) was built by Brunelleschi in the 15th century. Inside, his **Sagrestia Vecchia** (Old Sacristy) features sculptural decoration by Donatello. The cloister leads to the **Biblioteca Laurenziana**, built to house the Medici collection of some 10,000 manuscripts. Closed to all but researchers, the library's real highlight is Michelangelo's stairway, thankfully open to all.

Around the corner, the sumptuous **Cappelle Medicee** (Map p674; ☎ 055 238 86 02; Piazza Madonna degli Aldobrandini; admission €6; ☎ 8.15am-4.50pm Tue-Sat, 1st, 3rd & 5th Sun of month, 1st & 4th Mon) include the extravagant **Cappella dei Principi**, the principal burial place of the Medici grand dukes, and the incomplete **Sagrestia Nuova**, Michelangelo's first architectural effort.

Festivals & Events

Scoppio del Carro (Explosion of the Cart) A cart full of fireworks is exploded in front of the Duomo on Easter Sunday.

Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (www.maggiofiorentino.com; April to Jun) Italy's longest-running music festival. **Festa di San Giovanni** (Feast of St John) Florence's patron saint is celebrated on 24 June with costumed soccer matches on Piazza Santa Croce.

Sleeping

Budget *pensionari* are concentrated around Via della Scala, west of the train station. Book ahead to avoid disappointment and always check rates as they drop noticeably in the off-season.

Campeggio Michelangelo (☎ 055 681 19 77; Viale Michelangelo 80; www.ecvacanze.it; per person/car/tent €9.80/6/5.70) Just off Piazzale Michelangelo, this large and well-equipped camping ground is the nearest to the city centre. Take bus 13 from the train station, otherwise it's a steep slog up from the river.

Ostello Santa Monaca (Map p671; ☎ 055 26 83 38; www.ostello.it; Via Santa Monaca 6; dm €17; ☎ 1am curfew; ☎ ☎) In the Oltrarno, away from the worst of the crowds, the Santa Monaca is a friendly and efficient hostel. Dorms are large but guests get a special deal at a nearby restaurant.

AROUND THE DUOMO

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Feltrinelli International	2 C2	Gelateria Vivoli	25 D4
Internet Train	3 B3	I Fratellini	26 C4
Internet Train	4 D3	Yellow Bar	27 C4
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Laurenziana	17 C3	DRINKING	
Galleria degli Uffizi	18 C5	ENTERTAINMENT	
Loggia della Signoria	19 C5	SHOPPING	
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Ponte Vecchio	(see 13)	DRINKING	
Sagrestia Nuova	(see 10)	ENTERTAINMENT	
Sagrestia Vecchia	(see 10)	SHOPPING	
Torre d'Arnolfo	(see 19)	SLEEPING	
Walking Tours of Florence	21 B4	DRINKING	

Ostello Villa Camerata (☎ 055 60 14 51; firenze@ostellionline.org; Viale Augusto Righi 2-4; dm incl breakfast €17.50; 🏠) Housed in a 17th-century villa in its own lush park, northeast of town, Florence's HI hostel has 322 beds in various room combinations. It's also got a bar. Take bus 17, 17B or 17C from the train station. Reservations are essential in summer.

Ostello Archi Rossi (Map p671; ☎ 055 29 08 04; ostelloarchirossi@hotmail.com; Via Faenza 94r; dm incl breakfast €18-26; 🏠 📺) Boasting Florence's gaudiest frescoes, this is a boisterous backpacker pad. It's a great place to meet fellow travellers while catching up on laundry or microwaving dinner.

Hotel Dalí (Map p674; ☎ 055 234 07 06; www.hotel dali.com; Via dell'Oriuolo 17; d €80, s/d with shared bathroom

€40/60) Florence's best budget hotel. Owners Marco and Samanta go out of their way to ensure a pleasant stay while the spotless sunny rooms provide a homely retreat from the masses down the road at the Duomo.

Albergo Margaret (Map p671; ☎ 055 21 01 38; www.dormireintoscana.it/margaret; Via della Scala 25; d €90, s/d with shared bathroom €60/70; 🏠 📺) A warm welcome and pristine, peach-coloured rooms await you here. One of the best choices on Via della Scala, it offers comfort and muted style, for which you could easily pay more.

Hotel Scotti (Map p674; ☎ 055 29 21 28; www.hotelscoti.com; Via de' Tornabuoni 7; s/d €70/105) On Florence's smartest shopping strip, the Scotti is a gem. After a sing-along around the piano adjourn to your airy room, sparsely decorated with simple, rustic furniture.

Albergo Azzi (Map p671; ☎ 055 21 38 06; www.hotelazzi.it; Via Faenza 56; s/d incl breakfast €70/140, with shared bathroom €60/90) All heavy wood, books and antiques, the Azzi exudes bohemian charm. Bag a room with a shared bathroom and you can enjoy the atmosphere while remaining on budget. On the second floor the **Hotel Marine** (☎ 055 26 42 51; d €70-110; 📺) is run by the same people.

Eating

Florence caters well to all budgets. There are hole-in-the-wall sandwich bars, Indian takeaways, earthy *trattorie* and some of Italy's top restaurants. Classic Tuscan dishes include *ribollita*, a heavy vegetable soup, *canellini* (white beans) and *bistecca alla Fiorentina* (Florentine steak).

QUICK EATS

Gelateria Vivoli (Map p674; ☎ 055 29 23 34; Via dell'Isola delle Stinche 7) Ice-cream aficionados rate the gelati here the city's best. Flavours range from orange chocolate to fig and walnut.

I Fratellini (Map p674; ☎ 055 239 60 96; Via dei Cimatori 38r; panini €2-3) Although no more than a hole-in-the-wall *panino* bar, I Fratellini is city institution. Locals horde to the tiny counter for fresh-filled *panini* ready in the twinkle of an eye.

Gustapanino (Map p671; ☎ 333 920 26 73; Via dei Michelozzi 13r; panini €3; 📺 10am-midnight) Just off Piazza Santo Spirito, Gustapanino does a roaring trade in *panini* and focaccia. To get some join the crowds of American students who lunch here every day.

Ramraj (Map p671; ☎ 055 24 09 99; Via Ghibellina 61r; set menus €8; 📺 Tue-Sun) Take time out from

pizza, pasta and *panini* to remind yourself what a good curry and naan can do. Eat in or takeaway.

RESTAURANTS

Trattoria Pane e Vino (Map p671; ☎ 055 24 38 03; Via dell'Agnolo 105; 1st/2nd courses €4/7; 📺 closed Sun dinner) For filling home-style food, this earthy trattoria does the job. The food – steaming bowls of *ribollita* and slabs of grilled meat – is as authentic as the dusty décor.

Yellow Bar (Map p674; ☎ 055 21 17 66; Via del Proconsolo 39r; pizzas/1st/2nd courses €5/6/7) Great for a pizza and beer, the perpetually popular Yellow Bar is a fine example of what an Italian pizzeria should be – crowded, noisy and fun.

Mario's (Map p671; Via Rosina 2r; 1st/2nd courses €4/8; 📺 lunch Mon-Sat) A busy, cheerful trattoria full of market workers and tourists, Mario's is well known for its hearty pastas and traditional main courses – all served at prices rare for such a central spot.

Trattoria Casalinga (Map p671; ☎ 055 21 86 24; Via dei Michelozzi 9r; 1st/2nd courses €5/7; 📺 Mon-Sat) The Casalinga is a brash, no-frills tratt that offers a workaday menu of pasta staples and simple meat dishes. Always full, it's better for a swift fill-up than a long, lingering lunch.

Borgo Antico (Map p671; ☎ 055 21 04 37; Piazza Santo Spirito 6r; pizzas & salads/2nd courses €7/12) This trendy, piazza-side eatery is ideal for whiling away a summer evening over a pizza and glass of something cool. Select from the menu of leafy salads, wood-fired pizzas and Tuscan specialties.

SELF CATERING

The central **food market** (Map p674; Piazza San Lorenzo; 📺 7am-2pm Mon-Sat) is good for fresh produce. There's also a **supermarket** (Map p671; Stazione Santa Maria Novella) at the train station and a **Standa** (Map p671; Via Pietrapiana 94) east of Piazza del Duomo.

Drinking

Angie's Pub (Map p674; ☎ 055 28 37 64; Via dei Neri 35r; snacks €3-5) Whether an exercise in postmodernist irony or simply a tribute to the owner, the name sucks. Still, Angie's is a perfectly good little pub with decent beer, cheap lunches and a huge *panini* list.

Cabiria (Map p671; ☎ 055 21 53 72; Piazza Santa Spirito 4/r; 📺 Wed-Mon) By day a pleasant enough café, Cabiria morphs into a cool bar at night. Its understated vibe lends itself perfectly to hours of languid people-watching.

Joshua Tree Pub (Map p671; Via della Scala 37r; happy-hr pint €2.60; ☎ 4pm-1am, happy hr 4-9pm) This thumping pub rocks, more often to the Beta Band than the Pogues, but the Guinness is still great. Smoky, rowdy and totally addictive.

Moyo (Map p674; ☎ 055 247 97 38; Via dei Benci 23r) A mixed crowd of sharp locals and foreign students drink at this funky modern bar. Good for an aperitif to a soundtrack of upbeat jazz.

Entertainment

Florence's definitive monthly listings guide *Firenze Spettacolo* is sold at newsstands (€1.75).

Concerts, opera and dance are performed year-round at the **Teatro Comunale** (☎ 800 11 22 11; Corso Italia 16), which is also the venue for the Maggio Musicale Fiorentino (see p673).

English-language films are screened at the **Odeon Cinehall** (Map p674; ☎ 055 21 40 68; www.cinehall.it, in Italian; Piazza Strozzi; tickets €7.20) on Mondays, Tuesday and Thursday.

Shopping

Florence's main shopping area is between the Duomo and the Arno. Just north of the Duomo is the **market** (Map p674; Piazza San Lorenzo; ☎ Mon-Sat) is good for leather goods, clothing and jewellery, although quality and prices vary. For bric-a-brac head for the **fleamarket** (Map p671; Piazza dei Giompi; ☎ daily) north of Santa Croce.

Getting There & Away

The main airport serving Florence is Pisa's **Galileo Galilei airport** (code PSA; ☎ 050 50 07 07; www.pisa-airport.com). There's also a small city airport 5km north of Florence, **Amerigo Vespucci** (code FLR; ☎ 055 37 34 98; www.aeroporto.firenze.it).

From the **SITA bus station** (Map p671; ☎ 800 37 37 60; www.sita-on-line-it, in Italian; Via Santa Caterina da Siena 17) buses leave for Siena (€6.50, 1¼ hours, hourly) and, via Poggibonsi, San Gimignano (€6, 1¼ hours, 14 daily).

There are regular trains to/from Pisa (Regional; €5.10, 1¼ hours, every 20 minutes), Rome (€25, 2½ hours, half hourly), Bologna (€11, one hour, every 20 minutes) and Milan (Eurostar; €29, 2¾ hours, 22 daily). To get to Venice change trains at Bologna. Check the latest departure times at the **train information office** (☎ 7am-9pm) in the station's main foyer.

Getting Around

ATAF (☎ 800 42 45 00; www.ataf.net) buses service the city centre and Fiesole, a small town in the hills 8km northeast of Florence. The most useful terminal is just outside the station's eastern exit. Take bus 7 for Fiesole and bus 13 for Piazzale Michelangelo. Tickets cost €1/1.80/4.50 for one/three/24 hours.

To rent a car, try **Hertz** (Map p671; ☎ 055 239 82 05; Via M Finiguerra 33r) or **Avis** (Map p671; ☎ 055 21 36 29; Borgo Ognissanti 128r).

Alinari (Map p671; ☎ 055 28 05 00; www.alinari.com; Via Guelfa 85r; ☎ 9.30am-1pm & 2.45-6pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) rents out bikes from €7/12/24 for five hours/day/weekend.

PISA

pop 88,990

Veering upwards in permanent defiance of gravity, Pisa's Leaning Tower is a genuinely shocking sight. Tower apart, Pisa is a pleasant, unassuming university town that won't hinder you long.

Pisa's heyday came in the 12th and 13th centuries when it was a maritime power rivaling Genoa and Venice. It was eventually defeated by the Genoese in 1284 and, in 1406, fell to Florence. Under the Medici, the arts and sciences flourished and Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) taught at the university.

Orientation & Information

From Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II, just north of the train station, the Leaning Tower is a straightforward 1.5km walk across the Arno and through the medieval town centre. Alternatively, take bus 1 from the train station.

There are three **tourist offices**: city centre (☎ 050 4 22 91; Piazza Vittorio Emanuele II 16; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm Sun); Leaning Tower (☎ 050 56 04 64; Piazza del Duomo 1; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, 10.30am-4.30pm Sun); airport (☎ 050 50 37 00; ☎ 10.30am-4.30pm & 6-10pm).

Go online at **Internet Planet** (Piazza Cavallotti 3-4; per hr €3.10; ☎ 10am-midnight Mon-Fri, to 8pm Sat, 2.30pm-midnight Sun) and wash your clothes at **Onda Blu** (☎ 800 86 13 46; Via San Francesco 8a; per 7kg wash/dry €5/5; ☎ 8am-10pm).

Sights & Activities

Arguably one of the world's most beautiful squares, the lawned **Campo dei Miracoli** (Field of Miracles) is home to Pisa's main sights: the cathedral, baptistry and Leaning Tower. Depressingly, it's also full of hawkers.

GETTING INTO TOWN

From Galileo Galilei airport regular trains run to the city centre (€1.10, five minutes, 15 daily) or you can take bus 1 which will drop you off at the train station.

The centrepiece of the Campo's Romanesque trio, the 11th-century candy-striped **cathedral** (admission €2; ☎ 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Mon-Sat, 2-5pm Sun) has a graceful tiered façade and cavernous interior. The transept's bronze doors are by Bonanno Pisano, but the 16th-century entrance doors are by Giambologna.

The cupcake **Battistero** (Baptistry; admission €5; ☎ 10am-5pm) was started in 1153 and completed by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano in 1260. Inside note Nicola Pisano's beautiful pulpit.

But it's the campanile, better known as the **Leaning Tower** (Torre Pendente; www.opapisa.it; admission €15; ☎ 9.30am-5pm) that's the highlight. Bonanno Pisano began building in 1173 but almost immediately his plans came a cropper in a layer of shifting soil. Only three of the tower's seven tiers were completed before it started tilting – continuing at a rate of about 1mm per year. By 1990 the lean had reached 5.5 degrees – beyond the critical point established by computer models. Stability was only ensured in 1998 when a combination of biased weighting and soil drilling forced the tower into a safer position. Today it's almost 4.1m off the perpendicular.

Visits are limited to groups of 30; entry times are staggered and queuing is inevitable. The entry times listed above change frequently – call ☎ 050 387 22 10 or log onto www.opapisa.it for confirmation. There are many combination-tickets, but admission to the Leaning Tower is *always* separate.

Sleeping & Eating

Ostello della Gioventù (☎ /fax 050 89 06 22; Via Pietrasantina 15; dm €15) About 1km from the Leaning Tower this no-frills private hostel offers Pisa's cheapest beds. Take bus 1 from the train station and make sure you've got some insect repellent – mosquitoes can be a nuisance.

Pensione Helvetia (☎ 050 55 30 84; Via Don Gaetano Boschi 31; s/d/tr/q €50/62/75/100, s/d with shared bathroom €35/45) This colourful *pensione* is a winner. The best rooms – sloping timber roofs and wrought-iron bedsteads – are on the top floor. No lift, though.

Fried Fish (☎ 050 58 10 11; Via Cavalca 11; snacks €3-5) A great takeaway specialising in delicious fried nibbles. For €5 the mixed platter includes fried onions, mozzarella, potatoes, octopus, prawns and bread. Perfect for eating on the hoof.

La Tana (☎ 050 58 05 40; Vicolo San Frediano 6; pizzas/1st/2nd courses from €4/4/5; ☎ Sat-Thu) Near the university, La Tana serves a steady stream of students and profs with abundant cheap pasta. If you're in a hurry, the *pasto veloce* (speedy meal, €7) comes all on one plate.

Trattoria La Buca (☎ 050 56 06 60; Via Gallit Tussi 6; pizzas/1st courses/2nd courses €6/7/11; ☎ Sat-Thu) Home-style Tuscan grub is what it does best. Portions are filling, prices are reasonable and the rustic atmosphere unhurried.

Getting There & Away

Galileo Galilei airport (☎ 050 50 07 07; www.pisa-airport.com) is linked to the centre by train and bus. **Lazzi** (☎ 050 462 88; www.lazzi.it, in Italian) buses depart from the airport to Florence (€11.40, two hours, hourly) via Lucca.

Trains run to Florence (Regional; €5.10, 1¼ hours, every 20 minutes), Genoa (€14, two hours, half hourly) and Rome (€26, three to four hours, 15 daily).

SIENA

pop 54,370

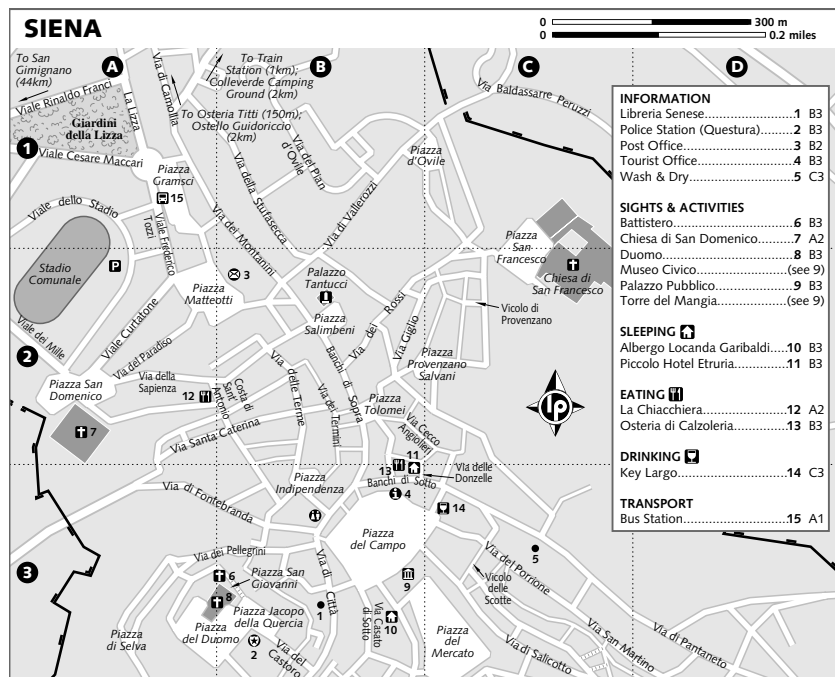
A Gothic gem, Siena is one of Italy's most enchanting towns. Its walled centre – a beautifully preserved warren of dark lanes punctuated by medieval *palazzi*, piazzas and churches – is a lovely place to pass a few idle hours. Action centres on Piazza del Campo (Il Campo), the sloping square that serves as a communal sun bed to scores of day-trippers.

According to legend, Siena was founded by the sons of Remus. In the Middle Ages its dramatic rise – on the back of banking skill – caused both political and cultural friction with Florence. Painters of the Siennese School (most notably the 13th to 15th centuries) produced significant works of art, and the city was home to saints Catherine and Benedict.

Orientation & Information

The centre's main streets – the Banchi di Sopra, Via di Città and Banchi di Sotto – curve around Il Campo. Visitors' cars aren't permitted in the centre.

Libreria Senese (☎ 0577 28 08 45; Via di Città 62-66) Bookshop with English books and newspapers.



Police station (Questura; ☎ 0577 20 11 11; Via del Castoro 23)

Post office (Piazza Matteotti 1)

Tourist office (☎ 0577 28 05 51; www.teresiena.it; Piazza del Campo 56; ☎ 9am-7pm)

Wash & Dry (Via di Pantaneto 38; wash/dry €3.50/3.50; ☎ 8am-10pm) Laundrette.

Sights & Activities

Ever since the 14th century the scalloped **Piazza del Campo** has been the city's focus. Forming the base of the piazza, the **Palazzo Pubblico** (or Palazzo Comunale) is a magnificent example of Siennese Gothic architecture. Soaring above it, the 102m **Torre del Mangia** (admission €6; ☎ 10am-7pm mid-Mar-end Oct, to 4pm Nov-mid-Mar) was completed in 1297. On the ground floor the **Museo Civico** (☎ 0577 22 62 30; admission €7; ☎ 10am-7pm mid-Mar-end Oct, to 5.30pm Nov-mid-Feb, to 6.30pm rest of the year) houses a rich collection of Siennese art.

The spectacular **Duomo** (☎ 0577 473 21; admission €3; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-5.30pm Sun Mar-end May, 10.30am-8pm Mon-Sat, 1.30-6.30pm Sun Jun-end Aug, 10.30am-7.30pm daily Sep-end Oct, 10.30am-6pm Mon-Sat Nov-end Feb) is another Gothic masterpiece. Begun in 1196 it was completed in

1215, although work continued well into the 13th century. Inside, it's the 14th-century **inlaid-marble floor** (€6; ☎ 10.30am-7.30pm mid-Jun-mid Oct) that's the highlight. Other noteworthy features include Donatello's bronze of St John the Baptist, and statues of St Jerome and Mary Magdalene by Bernini.

North of the cathedral, the **Battistero** (Baptistry; Piazza San Giovanni; admission €3; ☎ 9am-8pm Jun-end Aug, to 7pm Sep-May) has a Gothic façade and a rich frescoed interior.

On the western edge of the walled city, the **Chiesa di San Domenico** (Piazza San Domenico 1; admission free; ☎ 7.30am-1pm & 3-6.30pm) is the last resting place of St Catherine's head. You'll find it above the altar in the Cappella di Santa Caterina.

Festivals & Events

Siena's great annual event is the **Palio** (2 July and 16 August), a pageant culminating in a bareback horse race round Il Campo. The city is divided into 17 **contrade** (districts), of which 10 are chosen annually to compete for the **palio** (silk banner). The only rule in the three-lap race is that jockeys can't tug the reins of other horses.

Sleeping

It's always advisable to book ahead, but for August and during Palio it's essential.

Colleverde Camping Ground (☎ 0577 28 00 44; campingsiena@teresiena.it; Strada di Scacciapensieri 47; per person/tent €7.50/7.50; ☎ mid-Apr-mid Oct; ☎) A large, well-organised camping ground 2km north of the historic centre (take bus 3 from Piazza Gramsci). On-site facilities include a swimming pool and bar.

Ostello Guidoriccio (☎ 0577 522 12; siena@ostellionline.org; Via Fiorentina 89; per person €13.90) An inconvenient 20-minute bus ride from the town centre, Siena's HI hostel is clean, quiet-ish and very cheap. Take bus 10 or 15 from Piazza Gramsci, or bus 77 from the train station, and tell the driver you're after the *ostello* (hostel).

Piccolo Hotel Etruria (☎ 0577 28 80 88; www.hotel.etruria.com; Via delle Donzelle 3; s/d €53/83, s with shared bathroom €48; ☎) A family-run *pensione* just yards from Il Campo, the Etruria offers nine bright, basic rooms. There's a 1am curfew, but it's not a problem as Siena rarely kicks on that long.

Albergo Locanda Garibaldi (☎ 0577 28 42 04; Via Giovanni Duprè 18; d/tr/t/€75/95/110, menus €20) Smarter inside than out, this small hotel is exceptional value for money. Above the in-house trattoria there are seven charming rooms with parquet and low wood-beamed ceilings.

Eating & Drinking

The ubiquitous Ciao and Spizzico have outlets on Il Campo.

Osteria Titti (☎ 0577 480 87; Via di Camollia 193; 1st/2nd courses €6/7.50; ☎ Sun-Fri) A down-to-earth neighbourhood trattoria that specialises in stolid Tuscan fare at honest prices. Order *salsiccia toscana con fagioli* for a plate of bangers and beans.

La Chiacchiera (☎ 0577 28 06 31; Costa di Sant'Antonio 4; 1st/2nd courses €4/6) With its rustic wooden tables and stone walls this is a quaint spot. Typical of its seasonal food are the autumnal *pici boscaiola* (thick spaghetti

with mushrooms). In the summer there's outdoor seating.

Osteria di Calzoleria (☎ 0577 28 90 10; Via di Calzoleria 12; 1st/2nd courses €7/11; ☎ dinner) A lively place for a bowl of *ribollita* and other regional classics. The excellent *contorni* (side dishes) are ideal for vegetarians.

Key Largo (☎ 0577 23 63 39; Via Rinaldini 17) The 1st-floor balcony of this innocuous little bar is a great place to down cocktails while surveying the masses on Il Campo below.

Getting There & Away

Siena is not on a main train line so it's easier to take a bus. From the bus station on Piazza Gramsci, **Tra-in** (☎ 0577 20 42 46) and SITA buses run to/from Florence (€6.50, 1¼ hours, hourly) and San Gimignano (€5.20, 1¼ hours, 14 daily, either direct or via Poggibonsi). **Sena** (☎ 0577 28 32 03; www.sena.it) operates services to/from Rome (€17.50, three hours, 11 daily). Both Tra-in and Sena have ticket offices underneath the piazza.

SAN GIMIGNANO

pop 7100

Dubbed the medieval Manhattan, San Gimignano is a tiny hilltop town deep in the Tuscan countryside. A mecca for day-trippers, it owes its nickname to the 11th-century towers that soar above the *centro storico*. Originally 72 were built as monuments to the town's wealth, but only 13 remain. To avoid the worst of the crowds visit in midweek, preferably in deep winter.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0577 94 00 08; Piazza del Duomo 1; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mar-Oct, 9am-1pm & 2-6pm Nov-Feb) is a short walk from the bus stops on Piazza dei Martiri di Montemaggia.

On Piazza del Duomo, the **Palazzo Comunale** (☎ 0577 99 03 12; Piazza del Duomo; adult/child €5/4; ☎ 9.30am-7pm Mar-Oct, 10am-5.30pm Nov-Feb) houses San Gimignano's art gallery, the **Pinacoteca** and the tallest tower, **Torre Grossa**.

The Romanesque **Duomo** (☎ 0577 94 03 16; Piazza del Duomo; adult/child €3.50/1.50; ☎ 9.30am-7.10pm Mon-Fri, to 5.10pm Sat & Sun Apr-Oct, shorter hr Nov-Mar), known also as the Collegiata, boasts frescoes by Ghirlandaio and a gruesome *Last Judgment* by Taddeo di Bartolo.

Hotels are expensive in San Gimignano but the tourist office has details of cheaper *affittacamere* and *agriturismi*.

Foresteria Monastero di San Girolamo (☎ 0577 94 05 73; Via Folgore 26-32; per person €25), run by a

GETTING INTO TOWN

The easiest way to get to Siena is by bus. From the bus station on Piazza Gramsci, Il Campo is a short, signposted walk away. To get to Piazza Gramsci from the train station take bus 8, 9 or 10.

squadron of friendly nuns, is a good budget choice with spacious, basic rooms sleeping two to five people. Pay €2 extra for breakfast.

Enoteca Gustavo (☎ 0577 94 00 57; Via San Matteo 29; snacks from €3.50), an atmospheric brick-vaulted *enoteca*, serves a range of delicious *bruschette* and *panini*, and smooth Chianti.

Regular buses link San Gimignano with Florence (€6, 1¼ hours, 14 daily) and Siena (€5.20, 1¼ hours, 11 daily). Most require a change at Poggibonsi.

PERUGIA

pop 153,850

Hilltop Perugia is a lively medieval centre. There's not much to see, other than sweeping views of the Umbrian countryside, but the presence of the University for Foreigners ensures a buzz that's not always apparent in the region's rural hinterland. In July music fans inundate the city for the Umbria Jazz Festival.

Perugia has a bloody past. In the Middle Ages, the Baglioni and Oddi families clashed, while later as a papal satellite the city fought with its neighbours. All the while art and culture thrived: Perugino and Raphael, his student, both worked here.

Orientation & Information

Perugia's main strip, Corso Vannucci, runs north-south from Piazza Italia down to Piazza IV Novembre, the centre's main square. City maps are available at the **tourist office** (☎ 075 573 64 58; Piazza Matteotti 18; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3.30-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun) opposite the **post office** (☎ 075 573 69 77; Piazza Matteotti).

Check your email at **Perugi@web** (Via Ulisse Rocchi 30; per hr €2.50; ☎ 10am-11pm Mon-Fri, noon-11pm Sat, 4-11pm Sun).

Sights & Activities

Perugia's austere 14th-century **Duomo** (☎ 075 572 38 32; Piazza IV Novembre; ☎ 7am-12.30pm & 4pm-6.45pm Mon-Sat, 8am-12.45pm & 4-6.45pm Sun) has an unfinished two-tone façade and, inside, the Virgin Mary's wedding ring, unveiled every 30 July.

In the centre of Piazza IV Novembre, the **Fontana Maggiore** was carved by Nicola and Giovanni Pisano between 1275 and 1278.

The 13th-century **Palazzo dei Priori** houses Perugia's best museums, including the **Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria** (☎ 075 572 10 09; Corso Vannucci 19; adult/concession €6.50/3.25; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm) whose collection contains works by Perugino and Pinturicchio.

At the southern end of Corso Vannucci, the **Rocca Paolina** (Paolina Fortress) is the remnant of a massive 16th-century citadel. Exhibitions are sometimes held in the underground ruins.

Etruscan remains include the **Arco Etrusco** (Etruscan Arch) and the 36m-deep **Pozzo Etrusco** (Etruscan Well; ☎ 075 573 36 69; Piazza Danti 18; ☎ 10am-1.30pm & 2.30-6.30pm Apr-Oct, to 5pm Nov-Mar).

Sleeping

Centro Internazionale per la Gioventù (☎ 075 572 28 80; www.ostello.perugia.it; Via Bontempi 13; dm €14.50, linen €2; ☎ closed mid-Dec-mid-Jan) A private hostel with four- to six-bed dorms, a frescoed TV room and great views from the terrace. The lockout (9.30am to 4pm) and midnight curfew are strictly enforced.

Bed & Breakfast Spagnoli (☎ 075 573 51 27; www.perugiaonline.com/bbspagnoli; Via Cesare Caporali 17; s/d/tr incl breakfast €38/58/75) If a home-style B&B is what you're after, look no further. The English-speaking Spagnoli family offers guests three spacious rooms in their cheerful home near Piazza Italia.

Primavera Mini Hotel (☎ 075 572 16 57; www.primaveraminihotel.com; Via Vincioli 8; s/d €48/70; ☎) On the top floor of a 16th-century palazzo – hence memorable views – this intimate two-star has spruce modern rooms decorated with understated style.

Eating

Don't leave town without trying Perugia's famous chocolate.

Caffè Morlacchi (☎ 075 572 17 60; Piazza Morlacchi 8; panini/meals €3/7; ☎ 8am-1am Mon-Sat) Join the international crowd at this hip student bar for a cheap lunch and cool beer.

Pizzeria Mediterranea (☎ 075 572 63 12; Piazza Piccinino 11/12; pizzas from €4.50; ☎ Wed-Mon) Finding good pizza in Italy is easy; finding excellent pizza is not. You'll get it here though. Charred to perfection in the wood oven, they're served by surly waitresses.

Ristorante dal Mi' Cocco (☎ 075 573 25 11; Corso Giuseppe Garibaldi 12; set menus €13; ☎ Tue-Sun) A fun restaurant with long communal tables and an ebullient taverna vibe. Meals are dished up according to the weekly menu, written in local dialect – eg *polenta 'nc la salsiccia* (polenta with sausage).

Self-caterers can shop at the **Coop supermarket** (Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 9am-8pm) or, next door, at the **Covered Market** (☎ 7am-1.30pm Mon-Sat & 4.30-7.30pm Sat).

Getting There & Away

From the intercity bus station on Piazza dei Partigiani, **Sulga** (☎ 800 09 96 61; www.sulga.it, in Italian) buses depart for Florence (€10, two hours, one daily) and Rome (€15, three hours, five daily), continuing onto Fiumicino Airport (€20, four hours). **Sena** (☎ 800 930 960; www.sena.it, in Italian) serves Siena (€11, 1½ hours, three daily) while **APM** (☎ 075 50 67 81; www.apmperugia.it, in Italian) and **SSIT** (☎ 0742 67 07 46; www.spoletina.com) buses head up to Assisi (€3, one hour, 13 daily).

Regional trains connect with Rome (€10, 2½ hours, seven daily), Florence (€8, two hours, five daily) and Assisi (€1.65, 20 minutes, hourly).

Getting Around

The train station is downhill from the historic centre; take bus 6, 7 or 15A to Piazza Italia. From the intercity bus station, jump on the free **scala mobila** (public escalator; ☎ 6.15-1.45am) for the centre.

ASSISI

pop 26,030

Seen from afar, the only clue to Assisi's importance is the imposing form of the Basilica di San Francesco jutting over the hill side. Thanks to St Francis, born here in 1182, this quaint medieval town is today a major destination for millions of pilgrims.

The **tourist office** (☎ 075 81 25 34; www.umbria2000.it; Piazza del Comune 22; ☎ 8am-6.30pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm & 2-5pm Sun Apr-Oct, shorter hr Nov-Mar) can provide practical information.

Sights & Activities

Dress rules are applied rigidly at the main religious sights, so no shorts, miniskirts or low-cut dresses and tops.

The 13th-century **Basilica di San Francesco** (☎ 075 81 90 01; Piazza di San Francesco) comprises two churches. The Gothic **upper church** (☎ 8.30am-6.50pm Mon-Sat, to 7.15pm Sun Easter-Nov; 8.30am-6pm Nov-Easter) was damaged during an earthquake in 1997, but has since been restored to its former state. It features superb frescoes by Giotto and works by Cimabue and Pietro Cavallini.

In the dimly lit **lower church** (☎ 6.30am-6.50pm Mon-Sat, 6.30am-7.15pm Sun Easter-Nov; 6.30am-6pm Nov-Easter) you'll find a series of colourful frescoes by Simone Martini, Cimabue and Pietro Lorenzetti and, beneath the floor, the crypt where St Francis is buried.

The 13th-century **Basilica di Santa Chiara** (☎ 075 81 22 82; Piazza Santa Chiara; ☎ 6.30am-noon & 2-7pm Apr-Oct, to 6pm Nov-Mar) contains the remains of St Clare, friend of St Francis and founder of the Order of Poor Clares.

Sleeping & Eating

Peak times are Easter, August, September and the Feast of St Francis (3 and 4 October).

Ostello della Pace (☎ 075 81 67 67; Via di Valecchie 177; www.assisihostel.com; dm/d/q per person incl breakfast €15/17/17; ☎) Family-run and housed in a 17th-century farmhouse, Assisi's HI hostel is set in its own lovely grounds. It's on the bus route between the train station and Assisi.

Grotta Antica (☎ 075 81 34 67; Via Macelli Vecchi 1; s/d/tr €30/40/50) Just off Piazza del Comune, this hospitable *pensione* offers seven clean, spartan rooms at bargain-basement prices. Downstairs in the trattoria (1st/2nd courses €7/8) the food is similarly modest and well-priced.

Trattoria Pallotta (☎ 075 81 26 49; Vicolo della Volta Pinta 2; 1st/2nd courses €7/12; ☎ Wed-Mon) A brick-vaulted, wood-beamed trattoria with tasty, unapologetically local food. Sit down to home-made *strangozzi* (like tagliatelle) and strong, meaty rabbit stew.

Getting There & Away

APM and SSIT buses connect Assisi with Perugia (€3, one hour, 13 daily), departing from Piazzas Matteotti and Unità d'Italia. Sulga operates buses to Rome (€16.50, three hours, two daily) and Florence (€11, 2½ hours, one daily).

Assisi's train station is 4km downhill from the centre in Santa Maria degli Angeli. A shuttle bus (Linea C, €0.90, half hourly) runs between Piazza Matteotti and the station. Hourly trains run to Perugia (€1.65, 20 minutes).

ANCONA

pop 101,540

Unless you're taking a ferry to Greece, Croatia or Turkey, you won't want to hang around in Ancona, Le Marche's regional capital and Italy's largest Adriatic port.

Buses 1 and 4 connect the train station to the port and town centre. The most convenient **tourist office** (☎ 071 20 11 83; ☎ 8am-8pm Tue-Sat, 2-8pm Sun & Mon Jun-15 Sep) is at the ferry terminal. Or it's 2km to the **main office** (☎ 071 35 89 91; www.turismo.marche.it; Via Thaon de Revel 4; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Sat, to 1pm Sun; limited in winter).

Many backpackers choose to sleep at the ferry terminal, but there's a perfectly good **Ostello della Gioventù** (☎ /fax 071 422 57; Via Lamatucci 7; dm €16) about 400m from the main train station.

Ferry operators have booths at the terminal, off Piazza Kennedy. Major companies include:

Adriatica (☎ 199 123 199; www.adriatica.it) To Split in Croatia (€46, 7½ hours).

Marmara Lines (☎ 071 207 61 65; www.marmaralines.com) To Cesme (€92, 55½ hours) in Turkey.

Minoan Lines (☎ 071 201 708; www.minoan.gr) To Greece's Igoumenitsa (€80, 16 hours) and Patras (€80, 22 hours)

Superfast Ferries (☎ 071 207 02 40; www.superfast.com) To Igoumenitsa (€74, 15 hours) and Patras (€74, 21 hours).

Regular trains connect Ancona with Bologna (€19.50, 2¼ hours, hourly) and Rome (Eurostar; €21.50, 3¼ hours, nine daily).

URBINO

pop 15,490

If you visit only one town in Le Marche, make it Urbino. It's a pain to get to, but as you wander its steep, Unesco-protected streets you'll be glad you made the effort. Birthplace of Raphael and Bramante, and a university town since 1564, it's still a bustling centre of culture and learning.

Get information and accommodation listings at the **tourist office** (☎ 0722 26 13; Via Puccinotti 3; ☎ 9am-1pm Mon-Sat, 9am-1pm & 3-6pm Sun May-Sep).

Urbino's centrepiece is the Renaissance **Palazzo Ducale** (☎ 0722 32 90 57; Piazza Duca Federico; admission €4; ☎ 8.30am-7.15pm Tue-Sun, to 2pm Mon), completed in 1482. Inside, the **Galleria Nazionale delle Marche** features works by Raphael, Paolo Uccello and Verrocchio.

To the north, the 15th-century **Casa di Raffaello** (☎ 0722 32 01 05; Via Raffaello 57; admission €3; ☎ 9am-1pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat, 10am-1pm Sun) is where Raphael lived until he was 16.

Albergo Italia (☎ 0722 27 01; www.albergo-italia-urbino.it; Corso Garibaldi 32; s €45-65, d €65-115, both incl breakfast; ☎), in the heart of the walled town, has rooms whose white walls and modern fittings contrast with the historic everything else around them.

Popular with local students, **La Balestra** (☎ 0722 29 42; Via Valerio Lorenzo 16; 1st/2nd courses €7/10) is a cheery eatery that specialises in meaty game dishes and autumnal pastas with

truffles and porcini mushrooms. There are also pizzas.

Trains don't run to Urbino. **Soget** (☎ 0721 54 96 20) buses link with Pesaro (€2.20, one hour, 16 daily) where you can pick up a train for Ancona. **Bucci** (☎ 0721 324 01; www.autolinee bucci.com) runs buses to Rome (€19, 4½ hours, twice daily).

SOUTHERN ITALY

You'll hardly believe you're in the same country as Milan or Venice, and for most Southern Italians this is a source of pride. Long regarded by the North as the poor stepchild, the literal and figurative heel of Italy, the South is actually a treasure-trove of all that is good about Italy and the best place to experience the languid sweet life, *la dolce vita*.

Often referred to by its position of the *mezzogiorno* (midday sun), the boot is inextricably linked to its former Mediterranean invaders: Greeks, Arabs and Spanish Aragonese. The Amalfi Coast and Capri hosts some of the finest scenery in the country, Matera will captivate anyone who makes the long trek and Naples is as unforgettable as your first love.

NAPLES (NAPOLI)

pop 1.04 million

As the birthplace of Sophia Loren, pizza and chaos, Naples is filled with a palpable frenetic energy most noticeable among the hordes of young people on Vespas who congregate outside bars, cigarettes dangling just so. You're never quite sure whether they're planning a party, a revolution or a heist, but you know whichever it is, it'll be a rollicking good time.

You'll never feel more alive than when you're in Naples. Granted, that might just be because you are never more aware of your own mortality as Vespas careen past while shady figures hover around your pockets. The ancient city was once queen of the Mediterranean and is pockmarked with a history worthy of the most cultured traveller.

Orientation

Naples commands a primo location, butted up between the Bay of Naples and Mt Vesuvius. Most trains and buses (except for the Amalfi Coast) come into **Piazza Garibaldi**, a 10-minute walk from the centre.

Information

DISCOUNT CARDS

Campania ArteCard (☎ 800 600 601; www.campaniaartecard.it; 3 days Naples/3 days Campania/7 days Campania €13/25/28) Free or discounted admission to dozens of museums, plus free public transport. Available at transport hubs and participating museums.

INTERNET ACCESS/LAUNDRY

Onda Blu (☎ 081 563 49 96; Via Zannotti 11; wash & dry €4.50; ☎ 8am-8pm; ☎) Internet access and laundry.

LEFT LUGGAGE

Train station (per piece for 5hr €3.80, per piece for 6-12hr €0.60, per piece after 12hr €0.20; ☎ 7am-11pm)

MEDICAL SERVICES

Guardia Medica After-hours medical service; phone numbers are listed in *Qui Napoli* (Here Naples).

Ospedale Loreto-Mare (☎ 081 254 27 01; Via Amerigo Vespucci) On the waterfront, near the station.

Pharmacy (☎ 081 268 881; Stazione Centrale; ☎ 8am-8pm)

MONEY

Every Tour (☎ 081 551 85 64; Piazza Municipio 5-6) Represents American Express, changes money and is a Western Union agent.

POST

Main post office (Piazza Matteotti; ☎ 8.15am-7pm Mon-Sat) Off Via Armando Diaz.

TOURIST INFORMATION

Ask for *Qui Napoli*, published monthly in English and Italian, listing events in the city and information about transport and other services. Be aware that the tourist offices may randomly close off-season if budgets are tight.

Tourist offices Stazione Centrale (☎ 081 20 66 66; ☎ 9am-7.30pm Mon-Sat, to 1.30pm Sun); Piazza del Gesù Nuovo (☎ 081 552 33 28; ☎ 9am-8pm Mon-Sat, to 3pm Sun)

Dangers & Annoyances

Granted, the crime rate is undeniably high – Naples saw over 100 Mafia-related murders in 2004 alone – and pickpockets and petty thefts are all too common, but the city's overall danger rate is improving.

Sights

First, be sure to visit the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (☎ 081 44 01 66; Piazza Museo Nazionale; adult/reduced €6.50/3.25; ☎ 9am-7.30pm closed Tue), which

houses the collection of the noble Farnese family and treasures from Pompeii and Herculaneum. If you can navigate the five jumbled floors, you'll be rewarded with life-size marble statues, mosaics, household Roman implements like dice and a reconstructed *triclinia* (sofa for reclining at meals), plus a **Gabinetto Segreto** (Secret Cabinet), where you can discover just how very fond ancient Romans were of the male nether parts.

In the heart of Spaccanapoli – the historic city centre – is the spacious Piazza del Gesù Nuovo, with the 15th-century rusticated façade of **Chiesa di Gesù Nuovo** and the 14th-century **Basilicata di Santa Chiara**, restored to its original Gothic-Provençal style after being severely damaged by WWII bombing. The beautifully tiled **Chiostro delle Clarisse** (Nuns' Cloisters; Piazza del Gesù Nuovo; admission €4; ☎ 9.30am-1pm daily & 2.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat), inside the basilica, is worth visiting.

The **Duomo** (☎ 081 44 90 97; Via Duomo; ☎ 8am-12.30pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm & 5-8pm Sun, closes 1hr earlier Nov-Feb) has a 19th-century façade but was built by the Angevin kings at the end of the 13th century on the site of an earlier basilica. Inside is the **Cappella di San Gennaro**, containing the head of St Januarius (the city's patron saint) and two vials of his congealed blood. The saint is said to have saved the city from disasters such as plague and volcanic eruptions.

In the Piazza del Plebiscito is the **Palazzo Reale** (☎ 081 794 40 21; admission €4.50; ☎ 9am-8pm Thu-Tue), the former official residence of the Bourbon and Savoy kings, now a museum.

Along the waterfront the 13th-century **Castel Nuovo**, with the **Museo Civico** (☎ 081 795 58 77; adult/reduced €5/4; ☎ 9am-7pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun) on the first three floors, overlooks the ferry port. The early Renaissance triumphal arch commemorates the entry of Alfonso I of Aragon into Naples in 1443. Situated southwest along the waterfront, at Santa Lucia, is the **Castel dell'Ovo** (☎ 081 24 00 055; Borgo Marinaro; admission free; ☎ 9am-6pm Mon-Sat, to 2pm Sun), originally a Norman castle and Angevin fortress. It's lovely enough, but the real draw here is just to wander the surrounding **Borgo Marinaro**, a tiny fishing village that feels a world away.

Catch the Funicolare Centrale (funicular) from Via Toledo to Vomero and the **Museo Nazionale di San Martino** (☎ 081 578 17 69; Via Tito Angelini; admission €6; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm, closed Wed), which has a gilded carriage, monastic spicery, Neapolitan nativity scenes and 14th-century science implements.

NAPLES (NAPOLI)

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Festivals & Events

The **Festa di San Gennaro** honours the city's patron saint and is held three times a year (first Sunday in May, 19 September and 16 December). Thousands swarm the Duomo to witness the saint's blood (held in two vials) liquefy, a miracle said to save the city from potential disasters.

Sleeping

Location is everything in Naples. Those who value convenience or have wee-hour trains might want to stay near the train station, although it is loud and lacks the historic ambience of Spaccanapoli. This historic centre is quite walkable, and the bus and metro system is excellent. Purchase your Campania Arte-

Card (p683) at the train station and public transport is included.

our pick **Hostel of the Sun** (☎ /fax 081 420 63 93; www.hostelnapoli.com; Via Melisurgo 15; d/t/q €70/90/100, dm/s/d/tr/q with shared bathroom €20/45/55/80/90; 🚻) Constantly winning awards and accolades for what is practically hostel perfection, HOTS has achieved an enviable balance between social and relaxing, well run but casual. Guests quickly become friends over a shared DVD or night out at a local pizzeria. All rates include breakfast; bring €0.05 for the lift.

Pensione Mancini (☎ 081 553 67 31; www.hostelpensione Mancini.com; s/d/tr/q €45/60/80/100, dm/s/d with shared bathroom €20/35/45) The best train station bet with free machine for coffee and hot chocolate 24/7, in-room lockers and free luggage storage. All rates include breakfast.

Bella Capri (☎ 081 55 29 265; www.bellacapri.it; Via Melisurgo 4; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €70/80/100/110, dm/s/d/tr/q with shared bathroom €22/50/60/84/100; 🚻 🚪) Across from HOTS with above average hotel rooms and a brand-new hostel with convivial common room, laundry facilities and in-room hairdryers.

6 Small Rooms (☎ 081 790 13 78; www.at6smallrooms.com; Via Diodato Liroy 18; dm/d incl breakfast €18/45) An Australian-run sixth-floor hostel (no lift) with a laid-back common room and lax regard for anti-smoking rules. Full kitchen, several private rooms.

Hotel Zara (☎ 081 2871 25; www.hotelzara.it; Via Firenze 8; s/d €45/65; 🚻 🚪) One of the nicer train station hotels, a bit smoky but safe, with a good-sized collection of English-language books.

Eating

You might hear a passing reference or two to the fact that pizza was created here. True Neapolitan pizza is all about the pureness of ingredients, time-tested leavening methods and a wood-fired brick oven. The pizzas themselves are usually nothing more than the classic *margherita* (olive oil, tomato sauce, basil and mozzarella cheese) or the *marinara* (tomatoes, garlic, oregano and olive oil). We're still not

quite sure how something so simple tastes so good, but we're pretty sure it has something to do with an alchemical transformation.

Available at takeaways called *friggitorie* all over town is *misto di frittura* (deep-fried vegetables), which includes fried zucchini flowers and breaded mozzarella sticks.

PIZZA

Da Michele (☎ 081 55 39 204; Via Cesare Sersale 1/3; pizzas €3.50-4.50; 🕒 10am-11pm, closed Sun) In the heart of pizza country is this, the apogee of pizza that calls itself 'Il Tempio della Pizza'. Open since 1870, it practically guarantees a raucously sacred experience. Choices are *margherita* or *marinara* and water, soda or beer.

Di Matteo (☎ 081 45 52 62; Via dei Tribunali 94; pizzas & calzones €4-5; 🕒 9am-midnight, closed Sun) Careful you don't miss the tiny tiled entrance. The owner didn't want to ruin the pizza essence with anything fancy, so expect paper plates, plastic cups...and really, really good pizza.

Del Presidente (☎ 081 21 09 03; Via dei Tribunali 120/121; pizzas €4) Bill Clinton probably has no clue that one visit to Di Matteo started a shrine, but a former *pizzaioli* (pizza maker) took the ex-Pres' visit as inspiration and opened this nearby contender. Downstairs is loud, packed and filled with Clintonian memorabilia.

Trianon (☎ 081 553 94 26; Via P. Colletta 46; pizzas €5-10) With marble-topped tables and a warm welcome, this place has been tossing very good pizzas since 1923.

NOT PIZZA

Just in case...

Leon d'Oro (☎ 081 54 99 404; Piazza Dante 48; pizza/1st/2nd courses €6/8.50/14; 🕒 closed Mon & one week in August) A homey, old-school restaurant with good service and intimate atmosphere. It serves pizza, of course, but the gnocchi and steak are a welcome distraction.

La Sfogliatella Mery (☎ 081 40 22 18; Galleria Umberto I) In the heart of the Chiaia shopping district is the elegant Galleria Umberto I shopping arcade and this famed pastry shop. A must is the *Babá al Rum* pastry.

Drinking

BARS

Farinella (☎ 081 423 84 55; Via Alabardieri 10; dishes €3.50-12; 🕒 restaurant until midnight, bar until 2am, closed Sun) Absolutely oozing with atmosphere, the young and hip make their way to this Chiaia lounge and chill spot. Live music Tuesday.

GETTING INTO TOWN

From the airport, take the Alibus airport bus (€3, 20 minutes, at least hourly) to Piazza Municipio or the port. Taxi fares are set at €22 with additional charges for luggage and night calls.

Bar Lazzarella (☎ 081 55 10 005; Calata Trinita Maggiore 7-8) Grab a drink and sit back for some people-watching off Piazza Gesù Nuovo.

CAFÉS

Caffé Gambrinus (☎ 081 41 75 82; Via Chiaia 12) Naples' oldest and most posh café is a beloved haunt for artists, intellectuals and musicians in the heart of the most fashionable street in Naples.

Intra Moenia (☎ 081 29 07 20; Piazza Bellini 70; salads & light meals from €8) Tucked onto a beautiful piazza, this café/bookshop/publishing house hosts the city's intellectual elite: it's arty, literary, left leaning – with excellent salads to boot.

Entertainment

The monthly *Qui Napoli* and local newspapers are the best guides to what's on when. In May the city organises Maggio dei Monumenti, a month of mostly free concerts and cultural events. Ask at the tourist offices for details. Near the Palazzo Reale is **Teatro San Carlo** (☎ box office 081 79 72 331; Via San Carlo 98; performances €25-120, discounts for under-30s 1 hr before curtain, tours €5), with opera, concerts or ballet performances (10% discount on tickets with the Campania ArteCard).

Getting There & Away

AIR

Capodichino Airport (NAP; ☎ 848 88 87 77; www.gesac.it) is about 6km northeast of the city centre. In addition to Alitalia and Lufthansa, several low-cost carriers arrive in Naples, including Easy Jet and Meridiana.

BOAT

Check the website www.traghettonline.net for information on all ferries in or out of Italy. The major companies out of Naples are **Tirrenia** (☎ 199 12 31 99; www.tirrenia.com), which operates ferries to Palermo (€55, 10½ hours, daily) and Cagliari (€44, 13½ hours, weekly) while its sister company **Siremar** (☎ 081 580 03 40) services the Aeolian Islands and Milazzo. **SNAV** (☎ 081 428 55 55) runs hydrofoils to the islands of Capri (€12, 30 minutes), Procida and Ischia, as well as Palermo. **Caremar** (☎ 081 551 38 82) services Capri (hydrofoil €12, 30 minutes; ferry €6, 1½ hours), Procida and Ischia by ferry and hydrofoil.

BUS

Buses leave from Piazza Garibaldi, at the train station, for Bari (€20, three hours), Lecce (€25, 5½ hours) and Brindisi (€23, five hours).

TRAIN

The main Naples train station is known as Stazione Centrale (sometimes called Stazione Garibaldi). Naples is the rail hub for the south, and regular trains for most major Italian cities arrive and depart from Stazione Centrale. There are up to 30 trains daily to/from Rome (€10 to €20, two to three hours).

The Ferrovie Circumvesuviana operates trains for Pompeii (€2.30, 35 minutes, hourly) and Sorrento (€3.20, one hour, hourly). The station is about 400m southwest of Stazione Centrale, in Corso Garibaldi (take the underpass from Stazione Centrale).

Getting Around

You can travel around Naples by bus, tram, metro and funicular. City **Unico Campania** (☎ 081 551 31 09; www.unicocompania.it) buses leave from Piazza Garibaldi for the centre of Naples and Mergellina. Single tickets are €1, all-day €3; but the **Compania ArteCard** (p683) is the best deal if you're hitting at least one or two museums.

POMPEII

Although former residents might not think so, the Mt Vesuvius explosion in AD 79 was one of the best things to happen to Roman archaeology. On 24 August, the volcano erupted, leaving behind fascinating **ruins** (☎ 081 857 53 47; www.pompeisites.org; adult/reduced €10/5, no credit cards; ☎ 8.30am-7.30pm Apr-Oct, 8.30-5pm Nov-Mar) that provide insight into the daily life of ancient Romans, perfectly preserved under six metres of volcanic ash. Pompeii was a resort town for the wealthy, and you can still walk its roads filled with impressive temples, a forum, an

THE FIRST GRAFFITI

To learn the true history of Pompeii, it's best to hear it straight from the Pompeians themselves. The eruption left behind walls and walls filled with graffiti, political inscriptions and for-sale signs. Here's a taste:

- The finances officer of the emperor Nero says this food is poison.
- Celadus the Thracian gladiator is the delight of all the girls.
- Chie, I hope your haemorrhoids rub together so much that they hurt worse than they ever have before!
- Phileros is a eunuch!

amphitheatre, apartments and a shopping district. The coolest/creepiest thing to see is the casts of the volcano's victims, created in 1863 by the director of excavations pouring Plaster of Paris on top of incinerated bodies.

There is a **tourist office** (☎ 081 85 75 347; infopompei@tin.it; Piazza Porta Marina Inferiore 12; ☎ 8am-3.30pm Mon-Sat) just outside the excavations at Porta Marina.

Catch the Ferrovie Circumvesuviana train from Naples (€2.30, 35 minutes, hourly) and get off at the Pompeii Scavi-Villa dei Misteri stop; the Porta Marina entrance is nearby. Or take a ferry from Naples Mergellina (€3.50, 45 minutes, three daily).

CAPRI

POP 7270

The Emperor Tiberius recognised the innate beauty of this Bay of Naples island. After his stepfather, the Emperor Augustus, visited on holiday, Tiberius set up permanent residence on Capri (pronounced *Ca-pri*) in AD 27, where he built 12 summer villas where he could engage in equal parts decadence, cruelty and debauchery. It's been an upmarket summer holiday destination ever since, although shopping has replaced young boys as the object of visitors' orgiastic attention. It's also a prime spot for walking.

Ferries stop at Marina Grande and buses head up to Capri and then Anacapri. Online information can be found at www.capri.it and www.capritourism.com. There are also numerous **tourist offices** (☎ 8.30am-8.30pm Apr-Oct, 9am-3pm Mon-Sat Nov-Mar; Marina Grande ☎ 081 837 06 34; Capri town ☎ 081 837 06 86; Piazza Umberto I; Anacapri ☎ 081 837 15 24; Piazza Vittoria 4) around the island. Contact **Rent an Electric Scooter** (☎ 081 83 75 863; Via Roma 68; per hr €10) if you want to...well, you know.

Sights & Activities

Although it's one of the world's biggest tourist attractions, Capri's **Blue Grotto** (admission €4; ☎ visits 9am-1hr before sunset, closed during rough seas) is actually a sparkingly magical sea cave that really shouldn't be missed. A return trip from the Marina Grande costs €17, but includes rowboat (with singing captain) and admission.

The most interesting points on the island are thankfully reached by foot, ensuring a bit of quiet away from the hordes. From Marina Grande, take a walk along the architectural engineering feat of **Via Krupp**, built by a German industrialist as a series of hairpin turns hewn from the rock that wind their way past

the nudist spot Grotta dell'Arsenale to the best viewpoint in all of Capri, the **Giardini d'Augusto**. One hour up a walking trail, along Via Tiberio, is **Villa Jovis** (admission €2; ☎ 9am-1hr before sunset), the ruins of one of Tiberius' villas. It's a gorgeous walk along Via Matrimonio to the **Arco Naturale** – follow the spur trail, marked by splashes of paint, winding up the piney hillside.

Sleeping

High season prices can range from 1 May to 30 September, but most places stay open from March or April until October or November. Don't even think about arriving in mid-August unless you have a reservation and a wheelbarrow full of cash, as prices shoot up on everything, even groceries.

Bussola di Hermes (☎ 081 838 2010; www.bussolahermes.com; Trav. La Vigna 14, Anacapri; d/tr/q/dm €26-28, d/€70-115, tr/€80-140, q/€100-170; ☎) The two dorm rooms and a handful of tiny doubles (charging dorm prices) are veritable steals, and all rates include breakfast. Just outside Anacapri town.

Albergo Stella Maris (☎ 081 837 04 52; Via Roma 27; s/d/tr/€50/110/150) One of the least expensive hotels on Capri, it's also incredibly central, open all year and all rooms have sea views.

Barbarossa (☎ 081 837 1483; P. 5; pizza/1st courses/2nd courses €7/8/12) Where the locals go when they want good pizza or simple pasta dishes.

Pulalli Wine Bar (☎ 081 837 4108; Piazza Umberto I; dishes from €4; ☎ closed Tue & winter) Perched in the clock tower overlooking Capri's main piazza, the place in town to sip local wine and nosh on tapas, especially on the terrace during summer.

La Capannina (☎ 081 83 78 899; Via Le Botteghe 12/14; pasta from €8) Metres away from the Piazzetta di Capri (the main centre of Capri town) is this family-owned restaurant, Capri's most beloved for over 70 years.

Getting There & Around

Capri is easily reached from both Naples and Sorrento. Several companies make the trip from Naples; see opposite. From Sorrento, ferries leave hourly in summer and cost about €5 (up to €11 for a hydrofoil or for the last ferry of the day). During the summer, **Metro del Mare** (☎ 199 60 07 00; www.metrodelmare.com) runs ferries from Sorrento (€5.80, one hour 35 minutes, five daily).

Local buses run from Marina Grande to Capri town and Anacapri and cost €1.30 each trip or €6.70 per daily ticket.

SORRENTO

pop 17,429

Perched on a cliff in the Bay of Naples and the jumping off point for the Amalfi Coast, Capri and Pompeii, Sorrento has been a busy seaside resort town for two millennia. Sometimes it feels like not one of these tourists has since left, especially in August. Despite its overcrowding, Sorrento remains a beautiful city with just enough elbow room to allow visitors to soak up its beauty.

There's an excellent **tourist information office** (☎ /fax 081 807 40 33; www.infosorrento.it; Via Luigi de Maio 35; ☎ 8.45am-6.15pm Mon-Sat, to 4pm Jan-Feb) inside the Circolo dei Forestieri complex. Check email at **Sorrento Service** (Via S Paolo 5/7; per 30min/1hr €3/5; ☎ 10am-10pm or later in Apr-Oct, until 7pm or 8pm Nov-Mar, closed Mon) or call friends back home.

Nube d'Argento (☎ 081 878 13 44; www.nubedargento.com; Via del Capo 21; per person/car €10/6, per tent €6-10, bungalows from €50 for 2 people in low season, €150 for 6 in August; ☎ ☎) This camping ground is tucked into a sea of olive trees 1km from Piazza Tasso and 200m from the beach.

Ostello delle Sirene (☎ 081 877 13 91; Via degli Aranci 160; dm/s/d €16/40/60; internet per 30min €2.60; ☎) Metal beds, no common room to speak of, and a rumbling train make this a good option for the price only.

Hotel Pensione Linda (☎ 081 878 29 16; Via degli Aranci 125; s/d/tr €35/60/80) Hosting Ostello delle Sirene refugees for over a decade now, Linda's is a clean and comfortable one-star alternative with a helpful owner. Ask for a back room.

La Basilica Ristorante Pizzeria (☎ 081 877 47 90; Via Sant' Antonino; pizza/1st/2nd courses €6/8/13; ☎ 11am-11pm) An absolutely enormous dining room for Italian standards, it's boisterous and packed with locals who flock for the seafood dishes.

Fauno Bar (☎ 081 87 81 135; Piazza Tasso 13/14/15; small dishes from €4) Serves good-value small meals, mouth-wateringly gorgeous pastries and gelato right on the main square for ample people-watching.

Sisa Supermercato (☎ 081 807 44 65; Via degli Arancia 157) Just past the hostel and Pensione Linda's, Sorrento's largest supermarket.

Getting There & Away

Circumvesuviana trains run every 30 minutes between Sorrento and Naples via Pompeii. At least 12 SITA buses a day leave from outside the train station for the Amalfi Coast, first stopping in Positano (€1.30, one hour

and then Amalfi (€2.40, 90 minutes). There are also hydrofoils and ferries which leave from the port at Marina Piccola for Capri (€5.80, 80 minutes, at least five daily, double in summer).

AMALFI COAST

'Dramatic scenery' doesn't do justice to the 50km of sheer rock cliff that is the Amalfi Coast. Villages are perched impossibly in between crags, and ancient terraced farming shows off the area's abundant citrus groves and flowers. As one of the most popular tourist destinations in Italy, you won't have this scenery to yourself, not even in the dead of winter, but the magical landscape is worth it.

There are tourist offices in the individual towns. For itinerary planning, www.amalfi coast.com is useful.

Getting There & Away

SITA buses head from Sorrento to Positano (€1.30) and Amalfi (€2.40), about hourly in summer. **Sorrento Rentacar** (☎ 081 878 13 86; Corso Italia 210a, Sorrento) rents out scooters and cars. Or, take a ferry from Naples' Molo Beverello to Positano (€9, 85 minutes, five daily) and on to Amalfi (€10, two hours, five daily).

Positano

pop 3900

With its Moorish flair and colourful houses, Positano is the most photographed, fashionable and expensive town on the coast. The hills behind the town are full of wonderful walks; pick up a hiking map at the **tourist office** (☎ 089 87 50 67; Via del Saracino 4; ☎ 8am-2pm & 3.30-8pm Mon-Sat year-round, 3.30-8pm Sun Jul & Aug) in front of the Santa Maria della Assunta church.

Hostel Brikette (☎ 089 87 58 57; www.brikette.com; Via Marconi 358; dm/d with shared bathroom from €22/65, d/tr from €75/120; ☎) Full service hostel with home-made breakfast, chill bar carved out of rock and a five-minute walk to the beach. All rates include breakfast.

Villa Maria Antonietta (☎ 089 87 50 71; Via C Colombo 41; r incl breakfast €80-100) All seven recently remodelled rooms are situated alongside a flower-filled terrace and have sea views.

La Tranquillità (☎ 089 87 40 84; www.continental.praiano.it; Via Roma 21, Praiano; 2 people & tent €39, bungalows €90) Has many sleeping options and the SITA bus stops outside.

Artists, tourists and romantics head to **Caffé Positano** (☎ 089 87 50 82; Viale Pasitea 168/170) to drink, talk or dine in the sumptuous indoor rooms or under the stars on the terrace.

Amalfi

pop 5528

A maritime superpower during the 11th century, Amalfi is now a legendary tourist resort. Despite being packed to the gills in summer, the town retains an appealing vibe. In the centre is an impressive **Duomo** (☎ 089 87 10 59) and nearby is the **Grotta dello Smeraldo** (admission €5; ☎ 9am-4pm), a rival to Capri's Blue Grotto. This is excellent walking terrain. The **tourist office** (☎ 089 87 11 07; Corso Roma 19; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat) can provide details.

SLEEPING & EATING

A'Scalinatella Hostel (☎ 089 87 14 92; www.hostel.scalinatella.com; Piazza Umberto I 5, Atrani; dm/d with shared bathroom €21/60, d €83) Just 1km west of Amalfi proper is a comfortable and quiet hostel with kitchen and laundry, and small breakfast included.

Residence del Duca (☎ 089 87 36 365; www.residence.delduca.it; Via Mastalo II Duca 3; d incl breakfast €70-180 depending on season; ☎) An amazing deal in the off-season, with practically palatial rooms and view of the gods.

Trattoria San Giuseppe (Salita Ruggerio II 4; pizza/1st courses/2nd courses €5/9/14) A tasty, family-run joint hidden away in Amalfi's maze-like alleyways; follow signs from Via Lorenzo d'Amalfi.

Pizzeria al Teatro (Via E Marini 19; pizza/1st courses/2nd courses €5/8/13; ☎ closed Nov-Mar) Good local dishes and a welcoming ambience. Follow the signs to the left from Via Pietro Capuana, the main shopping street.

MATERA

pop 57,315

At first glance, Matera doesn't seem real. It is one of the oldest continuously inhabited places on Earth. Prehistoric caves are just across the river from the 'newer' town, where residents and their farm animals shared caves without running water or electricity up until a few years before man landed on the moon. The caves – known as *sassi* – are a Unesco World Heritage site and, more recently, the setting of Mel Gibson's bloodbath *The Passion of the Christ*.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0835 33 18 17; www.matera.turismo.it; Via Spine Bianche 22; ☎ 9am-1pm & 4-6.30pm Mon-Sat, Tue-Thu afternoon only Nov-Mar) has plenty of *sassi* maps.

Sights & Activities

Within Matera proper are two *sassi* areas to discover, **Barisano** and **Caveoso**. Soon after Carlo Levi wrote his famous book *Christ Stopped at Eboli* (1945) about poor living conditions in Southern Italy, the Italian government considered the malaria-ridden area a national embarrassment and began to move citizens to the modern part of town. Now, tourists and artists are flocking to the area and even a high-tech firm has moved in.

In the Caveoso area, the churches of **Santa Maria d'Ildris** and **Santa Lucia alla Malve** have a plethora of history, with well-preserved Byzantine frescoes. In this complex is the **Casa-Grotta di Vico Solitario** (Sasso Caveoso; admission €1.50; ☎ 9am-8.30pm May-Sep, 9am-6pm Oct & Mar, 10am-5pm Nov-Feb), set up to show family life 40 years ago when a family of 10 might share one cave with a donkey and several pigs but without running water or electricity (which might have contributed to the infant mortality rate of over 50%).

Sleeping & Eating

All hotels listed are in the *sassi*.

Sassi Hotel (☎ 0835 33 10 09; www.hotelsassi.it; Via san Giovanni Vecchio 89; dm/s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €16/60/87/120/140; ☎) Hotel rooms are set within the Sassi Barisano caves and the two dorm rooms have been recently refurbished. Each hotel room has a view of the *sassi* and some have a private terrace.

Le Monacelle (☎ 0835 34 40 97; www.lemonacelle.it; Via Riscatto 9/10; dm/s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €16/55/86/95/135; ☎) This former monastery is also a cultural centre, and guests are invited to take part in the outdoor concerts during the summer. Rooms are decorated in monastic-chic: simple, quiet, comfortable.

Il Terrazzino (☎ 0835 33 25 03; Vico San Giuseppe 7, off Piazza V Veneto; set menu €14) During the summer, eat on the terrace overlooking the *sassi* for a visual and gastronomic treat.

Ginger Caffé (☎ 0835 33 53 07; Via Lucana 54) A great neighbourhood atmosphere, but the draw here is the *aperitivo* – buy a €5 drink and snack on a full meal's worth of delicious home-made savouries.

Fresh-produce market (Via A Persio) Daily market, just south of Piazza Vittoria Veneto.

Getting There & Away

Matera is most easily reached by long-distance bus or the private train line Ferrovie Appulo Lucane, which runs hourly from Bari (€4, 80 minutes). Catch a Marozzi bus between Rome's Stazione Tiburtina and Matera (€30, five hours, one daily). Buy tickets at **Biglietteria Manicone** (☎ 0835 332 86 21; Piazza Matteotti 3, Matera; 🕒 6am-9am & 11am-12.15pm & 3.30-7pm Mon-Fri, 5-7pm Sat).

BRINDISI

pop 90,020

Let's face it: no one is coming here except to catch a ferry. Despite its shady reputation, there are worse places to be for the day.

While in town, check your email, grab a snack or play video games at **Tetris** (☎ 0831 59 09 54; Via Bastioni S Giorgio 20/22; €1 per 20min; 🕒 10.30am-midnight Mon-Sat, 4pm-midnight Sun only in Nov-Feb), or stop by the **tourist office** (☎ 0831 52 30 72; www.brindisiweb.com or www.pugliaturismo.com; Viale Regina Margherita 44; 🕒 8am-10pm Jun-Sep, 8am-1.30pm & 2.30-8pm Mon-Sat Oct-May), housed in an old Crusader palace from the 11th century.

For day use or overnight, call **Carpe Diem** (☎ 0831 418 418, 338 323 55 45; www.hostelcarpediem.it; Via Nicola Brandi 2; camping per person €5, dm/s/d incl breakfast €15/25/40, day use €6; 📶), which offers free pick-up and drop-off (or take bus 3 from downtown), plus home-cooked pasta from €6.

With prices like these and 200m from the free shuttle bus, keep your expectations low at **Albergo Venezia** (☎ 0831 527 511; Via Pisanelli 4, off Piazza Mercato; s/d/tr/q with shared bathroom €16/26/48/60) and you'll do fine.

For a good and filling lunch, visit Amalia's kitchen at **Trattoria Pizzeria Regina** (☎ 0831 568 693; Largo Guglielmo da Brindisi 28; set menu €10, pizzas from €2.60) where Amalia single-handedly cooks up delicious four-course meals and pizzas.

Getting There & Away

Ferries, all of which take vehicles and have snack bars and sleeping cabins or berths, leave Brindisi for Greek destinations, including Corfu (10 to 15 hours), Igoumenitsa (nine to 12 hours) and Patra (15 to 20 hours), with much heavier traffic in summer. Boats also service Albania (daily) and Turkey (seasonal).

Agoudimos (☎ 0831 52 14 08; www.agoudimos-lines.com; Via Anime 23)

Blue Star Ferries (☎ 0831 56 22 00; www.bluestarferries.com; Corso Garibaldi 65)

Fragline (☎ 0831 59 03 34; www.fragline.gr; Corso Garibaldi 88)

Hellenic Mediterranean Lines (HML) (☎ 0831 52 85 31; www.hml.gr; Corso Garibaldi 8)

The largest, most expensive and most reliable of the lines, HML also officially accepts Eurail and Inter-Rail passes, entitling you to travel free in deck class (paying a €15 supplement in July and August). If you intend to use your pass, it is best to reserve in advance in summer.

Most ferries leave from Costa Morena, about 3km away but accessible by a free white shuttle that runs continuously between the train station, the city centre and ports. The port tax is €6, payable when you buy your ticket.

Check prices and availability at www.traghettonline.net or http://ferries.gr for destinations in Greece.

LECCE

pop 97,462

A university town and a masterpiece of baroque architecture, Lecce is a surprisingly happening little spot and a breeze to reach by train. This sparkling little city hosts an astonishing array of baroque architecture; the effect is of a crazy but delightful architect gone a bit mad. The stone opulence of the *barocco leccese* (Lecce baroque) means that Lecce is often referred to as the 'Florence of the South'.

The historic centre is a five-minute walk from the train station. Italy's most worthless **tourist office** (☎ 0832 24 80 92; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 24; 🕒 9am-1pm & 4-8pm Mon-Sat Jul-Sep, 9am-1pm Mon-Fri & 4-7pm Tue & Thu Oct-Jun) is located near Piazza Duomo.

Lecce's baroque style is most famously on display at the **Basilica della Santa Croce** (☎ 0832 24 19 57; Via Umberto I; admission free; 🕒 8am-1pm & 4-7.30pm). A team of artists worked throughout the 16th and 17th centuries to decorate the building and its extraordinarily ornate façade. In the **Piazza del Duomo** are the 12th-century **cathedral** (admission free; 🕒 6.30am-noon & 4-6.30pm), completely restored in baroque style by Giuseppe Zimbardo, and its 70m-high **bell tower**; the 15th-century **Palazzo Vescovile** (Bishop's Palace); and the **Seminario**, with its elegant façade and baroque well in the courtyard. The piazza is particularly beautiful at night, illuminated by floodlights. In **Piazza Sant'Oronzo** you can stroll a bridge spanning the remains of a 2nd-century-AD **Roman amphitheatre**.

Centro Storico (☎ 0832 24 28 28; www.bedandbreakfast.lecce.it; Via Vignes 2/b; s/d with shared bathroom incl breakfast €35/57, ste €80; 🍷) has a lovely solarium and library; it's run by the same family and in the same building as **Azzurreta B&B** (☎ 338 258 59 58; www.bblecce.it, in Italian; Via Vignes 2; s/d incl breakfast €35/63), which include kitchenettes.

Sweet Place (☎ 338 87 10 295; www.sweetplace.it; Via Frante d'Aragone 17b; s/d/tr €45/75/100) is an entire 16th-century apartment, complete with TV, hydro-massage shower, washer and dryer, and fully equipped kitchen.

Il Giardino dei Mocenigo (☎ 0832 30 11 08; Via dei Mocenigo 15; 1st/2nd courses €5.50/13) has a covered terrace, and pasta for €4 make this busy restaurant a good choice.

Trattoria Casereccia (☎ 0832 24 51 78; Via Colonnello Costadura 19; pasta from €6; 🕒 closed Mon) is a family-run favourite that serves good value food.

The historic centre hosts a cadre of picturesque little bars; one of the better ones is **Torre di Merlino** (☎ 0832 24 18 74; Vico del Tufo; 🕒 from 8pm), which serves over 400 wines and dozens of meats and cheeses that you can sample on a mixed plate for €14 to €20.

STP bus services connect Lecce with towns throughout the Salentine Peninsula, departing from Via Adua.

Lecce is the end of the main southeastern train line and there are trains to Brindisi (€2.30, 35 minutes, hourly), Bari (€8.60 to €12.20, two hours, hourly), Rome (€44, seven hours, six daily), Naples (€36, six hours) and Bologna (€53, 8½ hours), and throughout Puglia.

SICILY

This island, which the Italian boot seems poised to drop-kick into the Mediterranean, has been occupied by dozens of invading forces for the past three millennia, all of whom left their architectural, cultural and gastronomic marks. Go one step in any direction on the largest island in the Mediterranean and find the scars of domination: Greek temples, Arab domes, Byzantine mosaics, Norman castles, Angevin churches and baroque architecture. If you're short on time, visit Syracuse or Agrigento.

Getting There & Away

AIR

Flights from all over mainland Italy and from major European cities land at Palermo (PMO) and Catania (CTA), including the main Italian

airline **Alitalia** (☎ 06 22 22; www.alitalia.com), while low-cost carriers **Meridiana** (☎ 199 11 13 33; www.meridiana.it) and **Air One** (☎ 199 20 70 80; www.flyairone.it) both fly into Palermo and Catania.

BOAT

Sicily is accessible by ferry from Genoa, Livorno, Naples, Reggio di Calabria and Cagliari, and also from Malta and Tunisia. The main companies servicing the Mediterranean are **Tirrenia** (☎ 199 12 31 99; www.tirrenia.it), **Grimaldi** (☎ 091 58 74 04; www.grimaldi.it) and **Grandi Navi Veloci** (☎ 091 58 79 39; www.gnv.it). **SNAV** (☎ 091 58 60 66 in Palermo, ☎ 081 761 23 48 in Naples; www.snav.com) runs a summer ferry between Naples and Palermo. Prices vary by season and are highest July to September. Timetables vary, so check with any Italian travel agency or on the web at www.traghettonline.net. Book well in advance during summer, particularly if you have a car.

BUS

Direct bus services between Rome and Sicily are operated by **SAIS** (☎ 091 616 60 28; www.saistrasporti.it, in Italian) and **Interbus** (☎ 0935 56 51 11; www.interbus.it, in Italian), departing from Rome's Piazza Tiburtina. Buses service Messina (€27, 9½ hours), Catania (€30, 11 hours), Palermo (€35, 12 hours) and Syracuse (€32.50, 11½ hours).

TRAIN

Taking a train from the mainland to Sicily takes a bit of extra time to cross the strait on the mainland to Messina, but you don't pay extra for the ferry crossing.

PALERMO

pop 680,000

Palermo is chaotic and traffic-laden, filled with once-grand crumbling palaces and still-evident WWII bombing damage. It might not be the most tranquil city, but the striations of history make it a fascinating destination. Palermo has been conquered countless times by countless forces – Carthaginians, Greeks, Romans, Spaniards, Arabs, Normans, Byzantines, Savoy, Austrians et al – making the city feel somewhat like it was shaken up in a cultural, gastronomic and architectural snow dome for 2800 years and spewed out willy-nilly along a harbour.

Orientation

Palermo's historic core is large but easily manageable on foot, which is thankful, as driving here is a death wish. You can get from the

ferry terminal or train station to any hotel listed here within a 20-minute walk. The main historic sights radiate out from the intersection at the Quattro Canti.

Information

Lo Cascio Night Pharmacy (☎ 091 616 21 17; Via Roma 1; ☹ all night; closed 1-4pm Mon-Fri, 9am-7pm Sat & Sun) Just in front of the train station.

Ospedale Civico (☎ 091 666 11 11; Via Carmelo Lazzaro) Hospital.

Palazzo delle Poste (Via Roma 322; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 12.30pm Sat)

Police station (Questura; ☎ theft & lost documents 091 21 01 11, foreigners office 091 651 43 30; Piazza della Vittoria; ☎ 24hr)

Pronto Soccorso (☎ 091 655 37 29) First aid.

Sun Fone Center (Via Maqueda 125; internet per hr €2; ☎ 9am-11pm; ☎) Also has cheap international phone rates.

Tourist offices Piazza Castelnuovo 34 (☎ 091 60 58 351; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri); Stazione Centrale (☎ 091 616 59 14; ☎ 8.30am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Fri); airport (☎ 091 59 16 98; ☎ 8am-midnight Mon-Fri, 8am-8pm Sat) All are exceedingly helpful.

Sights

The intersection of Corso Vittorio Emanuele and Via Maqueda marks the **Quattro Canti** (four corners), the historic centre of Palermo where the four city districts converge. On each corner stands a building festooned with baroque sculptures commissioned by the Spanish viceroy when Palermo was under Spanish control. Nearby Piazza Pretoria houses the beautifully ornate **Fontana Pretoria**, one of the only examples of Renaissance art in the entire city, brought from Florence in the 16th century. For striking examples of baroque domes, check out the **Chiesa di Santa Caterina** and the **Palazzo del Municipio** (town hall).

Around the corner in Piazza Bellini is Palermo's top wedding spot, the famous **La Martorana church** (☎ 091 616 1692; admission free; ☎ 8am-1pm & 3.30-5.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-1pm Sun), with a striking Arab-Norman bell tower and stunning Byzantine mosaic interior, and next to the red-domed **Chiesa di San Cataldo**, which meshes Arab and Norman styles.

Perhaps the creepiest place in...oh, just about the entire world, is the **Capuchin Catacombs** (☎ 091 21 21 17; P.zza Cappuccini 1; admission €2; ☎ 9am-noon & 3-5pm), where there's an entire underground catacomb filled with skeletal remains and mummified bodies of Palermitans.

In Piazza Giuseppe Verdi is the grand neoclassical **Teatro Massimo** (☎ 800 65 58 58; www.teatromassimo.it, in Italian; guided tours adult/reduced €3/2; ☎ 10am-3.30pm Tue-Sun except on rehearsal days), Palermo's main theatre since 1897.

The huge **cathedral** (☎ 091 33 43 73; Corso Vittorio Emanuele; admission free; ☎ 9.30am-5.30pm), modified many times over the centuries, is a good example of Sicily's unique Arab-Norman style. At Piazza Indipendenza is **Palazzo Reale**, also known as the Palazzo dei Normanni, now the seat of the Sicilian parliament. Step inside and downstairs to see the **Cappella Palatina** (☎ 091 705 48 79; admission free; ☎ 8.30am-noon & 2-4.30pm Mon-Sat, 8.30am-2pm & 3-4.45pm Sun & holidays), a truly jaw-dropping example of Arab-Norman architecture, designed by Roger II in 1130 and lavishly decorated with exquisite mosaics. King Roger's former bedroom, **Sala di Ruggero** (☎ 091 705 43 17; admission free; ☎ 9am-noon Mon, Fri & Sat), is adorned with 12th-century mosaics; you can only visit the room with a guide (free).

Sleeping

Trinacria (☎ /fax 091 53 05 98; Via Barcarello 25; per person/site €4.10/7.50) The area's best camping is at Sferracavallo, by the sea. Catch bus 628 from Piazzale Alcide de Gasperi, reached by bus 101 or 107 from the station.

Hotel Regina Palermo (☎ 091 611 42 16; www.hotelreginapalermo.com; Corso Vittorio Emanuele 316; d/tr incl breakfast €52/72, s/d with shared bathroom €23/42) Just past Quattro Canti on the main street is this great-value hotel. All rooms come with heating, fan and TV. Street noise can be an issue, so bring earplugs.

Hotel Cortese (☎ 091 33 17 22; www.hotelcortese.net; Via Scarparelli; s/d/tr €35/60/80, s/d with shared bathroom €30/50, breakfast €4; ☎ ☎) Near the chaotic open markets of Ballarò is this adorable hotel, housed in a 1700s villa. Great towels, clean shared bathrooms and a small shared terrace.

Ambasciatori Hotel (☎ 091 61 06 68 81; www.ambasciatorihotelpalermo.com; 5th fl, Via Roma 111; s/d/tr/q €60/100/110/125; ☎ ☎ ☎) The fifth floor hotel's main charm is its 6th-floor rooftop terrace. Helpful English-speaking staff and internet (€3 per 15 minutes).

Eating

Palermo became a crossroads of cuisine 3000 years ago – a market city dedicated to trading spices between East and West – and has been

perfecting its cooking ever since. Many classic Sicilian dishes come from the Saracen/Arab influence from the 800s, including pasta, citrus fruit and ice cream. Locals dine late and restaurants rarely open for dinner before 8.30pm.

Antico Café Spinnato (☎ 091 58 32 31; Via Principe di Belmonte 107-15) This elegant pastry shop has been serving its loyal clientele since 1860; the cakes are works of art, the *gelato* heavenly and the shaded outdoor tables ideal for a coffee *granita*.

Osteria Cavalieri di Malta (☎ 091 58 65 95; Vicolo Pantelleria 30, next to Chiesa San Domenico; 1st/2nd courses €7/10; ☎ closed Wed) Casual neighbourhood restaurant with excellent home-made pasta.

Antica Focacceria di San Francesco (☎ 091 3202 64; Via Paternostro 58; mains €8, self-service €2-7) A local institution with workers since 1834, with take-away, self-service or sit-down restaurant.

Palermo's best open-air markets are the **Vucciria** (☎ Mon-Sat), in the narrow streets around Piazza San Domenico, and **Il Ballarò** (☎ daily), held in the Albergheria quarter off Via Maqueda; both have excellent offerings and unbeatable local colour.

Getting There & Away

Falcone-Borsellino Airport (code PMO; ☎ 091 70 20 111; www.gesap.it) is 30km west of Palermo along the A29. **Alitalia** (☎ 06 22 22; www.alitalia.it) flies in, as do one of the low-cost airlines such as **Air One** (☎ 199 20 70 80; www.flyairone.it) and **Meridiana** (☎ 199 111 333; www.meridiana.it).

The main intercity bus station is around Via P Balsamo, to the right as you leave the train station. Main companies include **SAIS Autolinee** (☎ 091 616 60 28; www.saisautolinee.it, in Italian) and **Interbus** (☎ 0935 56 51 11; www.interbus.it, in Italian). They head to the mainland through Messina.

Regular trains leave from the Stazione Centrale for Milazzo, Messina, Catania, Trapani, Syracuse and Agrigento, as well as for nearby towns such as Cefalù. Direct trains go to Reggio di Calabria, Naples and Rome.

GETTING INTO TOWN

From the airport, take a city bus (€5, 55 minutes, every half-hour) or train (€4.50, 5 minutes, at least hourly) to the Stazione Centrale (train station), which is at the southern end of the city centre. The ferry terminal is a 10-minute walk east of the city centre.

Boats leave from the port (Molo Vittorio Veneto) for Sardinia and the mainland (see p691). The **Tirrenia office** (☎ 091 602 11 11) is at the port.

Getting Around

Most of Palermo's city buses stop outside or near the train station. You must buy tickets before you get on the bus; they cost €0.80 and are valid for two hours, or it's €2.60 for a day pass.

AEOLIAN ISLANDS

The entire Aeolian Islands (*Isole Eolie*) chain is so stunning as to be declared a Unesco World Heritage site. The islands have been impressing visitors since Homer's hero Odysseus blew through here in the *Odyssey*. Formed by a volcanic eruption, the seven islands have a landscape distinct from both Sicily and the mainland. Residents emigrated 100 years ago because of difficult living conditions, but the tourists who descend upon its beaches don't seem to mind the lack of arable farm lands.

The islands have distinct personalities – from bustling Lipari to elite Panarea to the rugged beauty of Salina, Vulcano or Stromboli and the rustic, undeveloped Alicudi and Filicudi – but they all have overcrowded summers in common. Best to visit in spring or autumn.

There is a **tourist information office** (☎ 090 988 00 95; www.estateolie.it, in Italian; Via Vittorio Emanuele 202, Lipari; ☎ 8am-2pm & 4.30-7.30pm Mon-Fri, 8am-2pm Sat) in Lipari. Offices on Vulcano, Salina and Stromboli are open during summer only.

Sights & Activities

On **Lipari** visit the Spanish Aragon-built **citadel** (☎ 9am-7pm), with its fabulous **Museo Archeologico Eoliano** (☎ 090 988 01 74; admission €4.50; ☎ 9am-1.30pm & 3-7pm Mon-Sat) and museum. There are excellent walks on the island, as well as good snorkelling and scuba diving. The tourist office has information on trails, beaches and excursions.

With its pungent sulphurous odour, **Vulcano** is a short boat trip from Lipari. The main volcano, **Vulcano Fossa**, is still active, although the last recorded period of eruption was 1888–90. You can make the one-hour hike to the crater, or take a bath in the therapeutic hot muds.

On the most spectacular of the islands, **Stromboli**, you can climb the volcano. While

Recent activity has made it too dangerous to hike to the volcano's 841m summit, you can still hike 366m up the craters with a guide (or 274m without) and view the impressive Trail of Fire (Sciara del Fuoco) lava streaming down the side of the volcano. Contact **Magmatrek** (☎ 090 986 57 68; www.magmatrek.it) for guided treks to the crater (it only departs if groups are large enough).

Sleeping & Eating

Camping facilities are available on Lipari, Salina and Vulcano. Most accommodation in summer is booked out well in advance on the smaller islands, particularly on Stromboli, and many places close during winter. Prices skyrocket during summer, but you can find good deals outside high season.

LIPARI

Lipari has the most options and greatest range of accommodation, and from here the other islands are easily accessible by regular hydrofoil. Don't dismiss outright offers for *affittacamere* (room rentals) by touts when you arrive at the port – they're often genuine.

Diana Brown (☎ 090 981 25 84; dbrown@netnet.it; Vico Himera 3; s/d/tr €70/80/100, self-catered apt up to €100 in high season, ♻️) has 12 comfortable rooms that are centrally located. Small kitchenettes in self-catered apartments. Diana is a fountain of local knowledge; she and her husband also run **Gruppo di Navigazione** (www.navigazioneiregina.com), featuring boat tours of all the islands.

Baia Unci (☎ 090 981 19 09; www.baiaunci; Via Marina Garibaldi, Canneto; per person/site €8.50/15, bungalows per person €13-35; ♻️ closed 15 Oct-15 Mar) is practically on the beach with a pizzeria and boats for rent.

VULCANO

You'll find good value at **Hotel Torre** (☎/fax 090 985 23 42; www.hoteltorrevulcano.it; Via Favoloro 1; per person low/high season €39/78; ♻️), a modest affair with large rooms, kitchens and terraces, and beach access 150m away.

ALICUDI & FILICUDI

If you want seclusion and still-wild beauty, head for Alicudi or Filicudi. The former offers the simple but nice **Ericusa** (☎ 090 988 99 02; fax 090 988 96 71; Via Regina Elena; d €62, half-board per person €60), while Filicudi has the truly delightful **La Canna** (☎ 090 988 99 56; vianast@tin.it; Via Rosa 43; s/d €40/80). There are good restaurants at both.

Getting There & Around

Ferries and hydrofoils leave for the islands from Milazzo (easily reached by train from Palermo and Messina) and all ticket offices are along Corso dei Mille at the port. If arriving at Milazzo by train, catch a Giunta bus to the port. **SNAV** (☎ 081 428 51 11) and **Siremar** (☎ 081 580 03 40) run hydrofoils (€11.30), and the latter also has ferries (€7.50). SNAV also runs hydrofoils between the islands and Palermo (summer only).

TAORMINA

pop 10,700

Spectacularly located on a mountain terrace, with resplendent views of the glistening sea and Mt Etna, beautiful Taormina was long ago discovered by the European jet set, and the chic town is expensive and touristy. But even trinket shops and crowds can't hamper the allure, and its magnificent setting, Greek theatre, medieval centre and great beaches are as seductive now as they were for Goethe and DH Lawrence.

The **tourist office** (☎ 0942 232 43; www.gate2taormina.com; Palazzo Corvaja 1 at Lungo Santa Caterina; ♻️ 8.30am-2pm & 4-7pm, closed Sun) has local maps, excursion information, lists of *affittacamere* and B&Bs. Head to **Net Point** (Via Jallia Bassia 34; per min €0.10, minimum 20min) to check your email.

You'll recognise that famous Sicilian postcard image: the **Teatro Greco** (☎ 0942 232 20; Via Teatro Greco; adult/reduced €6/3; ♻️ 9am-4pm Nov-Feb, 9am-sunset Mar-Oct), a Graeco-Roman theatre, in the half-round looking out over the Ionian Sea. For relaxation, throw in an adventurous ride to the unique island beach, **Isola Bella**, accessible by **cable car** (one way/return €1.70/3; ♻️ 8am-8pm, until 1am in summer, every 15min).

Campeggio San Leo (☎ 0942 246 58; Via Nazionale; per adult/campsite €4.50/14.50) is a beautiful but barebones campsite located towards the coast.

Taormina's Odyssey (☎ 0942 245 33; www.taorminaodyssey.com; Trav A – Via G. Martino 2, off Fontana Vecchia & Via Cappuccini; dm/d incl breakfast €17/45) is just three dorm rooms and two doubles that share a small kitchen and convivial common room. A 10-minute walk from town; follow the signs for Hotel Andromaco.

Ritrovo Trocadero (☎ 0943 243 30; Via Pirandello 1; ♻️ 8am-midnight) is good, cheap and serves all-day traveller-friendly hours.

At **Granduca** (☎ 0942 249 83; Corso Umberto 172; pizzas from €5), excellent pizza and a spectacular terrace make this a consistently good choice.

Taormina is easily reached on the main rail line from Messina (€3.15, 50 minutes, hourly except 9.30am to 12.10pm) and Catania (€3.15, 45 minutes, hourly). You can also take the intercity bus **Etna Trasporti** (☎ 095 53 27 16) to Catania (€3, 1½ hours, hourly), leaving from Via Pirandello.

MT ETNA

Dominating the landscape in eastern Sicily between Taormina and Catania, Mt Etna (3350m) is Europe's largest live volcano, and is also one of the world's most active. Eruptions occur frequently, both from the four live craters at the summit and on the volcano's slopes, which are littered with fissures and extinct cones.

Recent activity has meant more disruption to services, and visitors should be aware that excursions are at the mercy of volcanic activity. Due to the volcano's unpredictability, you can no longer climb to the craters, although it is still possible to climb one of the peaks in front of the Rifugio Sapienza to get a small taste of the real thing. **Gruppo Guide Alpine Etna Sud** (☎ 095 791 47 55) or **Natura e Turismo** (☎ 095 33 35 43) organise excursions involving trekking and 4WD vehicles, led by a vulcanologist or alpine guide (day trips €55).

Mt Etna is best approached from Catania by **AST bus** (☎ 095 746 1096), which departs from the car park in front of the main train station at 8.30am, and leaves from Rifugio Sapienza at about 4.45pm (€5.15 return). The private **Ferrovia Circumetnea train line** (☎ 095 54 12 50; www.circumetnea.it) circles Mt Etna from Catania to Riposto, a 3½-hour trip. You can reach Riposto from Taormina by train or bus if you want to make the trip from that direction.

The youthful **Agora Hostel** (☎ 095 723 30 10; www.agorahostel.com; Piazza Curro 6, Catania; dm/d €18/45; ♻️) in Catania is known for its live music, cheap eats and good bar. It's the stopping-off point for Mt Etna, just a 30-minute bus ride from the volcano.

SYRACUSE

pop 126,000

Few places on the planet rival the historical importance of Syracuse (Siracusa, pronounced Sigh-ra-*coo*-sa). Founded in 734 BC by Corinthian settlers, it became the dominant Greek city-state on the Mediterranean, battling Carthaginians and Etruscans before falling to the Romans in 212 BC. Nowadays,

the largest battles are for parking spots in the packed historical centre, but the stunning archaeological park and position on the eastern coast of Sicily makes this a top destination.

Orientation & Information

Most of Syracuse is a sprawling suburb. Everything listed in this section, except for the archaeological park, is on the island of Ortigia, linked by the Umbertine bridge about 200m east of the train station along Corso Umberto I. The **tourist office** (☎ 0931 46 42 55; Via Maestranza 33; ♻️ 8.30am-1.45pm & 3-5.30pm Mon-Fri, 8.30am-1.45pm Sat) is just east of Piazza Archimede in the centre of Ortigia.

Sights

The **cathedral** (admission free; ♻️ 8am-noon & 4-7pm) was built in the 7th century on top of the Temple of Athena, incorporating most of the temple's original columns in its three-aisled structure. The splendid **Piazza del Duomo** is lined with baroque palaces. Just down the winding street from the cathedral is the **Fontana Aretusa**, a natural freshwater spring, said in Greek legend to have been formed from the goddess Artemis' handmaidens Aretusa, to protect her from unwanted attention from the river-god Alpheus.

NEAPOLIS-PARCO ARCHEOLOGICO

To get to the **Neapolis-Parco Archeologico** (☎ 0931 650 68; Viale Paradisa; adult/reduced €6/3; ♻️ 8am-7pm), catch bus 1 or 2 from Riva della Posta on Ortigia. The main attraction here is the sparkling-white 5th-century-BC **Greek theatre**, entirely hewn out of solid rock and facing seaward over the city. Nearby is the **Orecchio di Dionisio**, an ear-shaped artificial grotto used by Syracuse's resident tyrant Dionysius to eavesdrop on his prisoners. The impressive 2nd-century **Roman amphitheatre** is well preserved.

The excellent **Museo Archeologico Paolo Orsi** (☎ 0931 46 40 22; Viale Teocrito 66/a; adult/reduced €6/3; ♻️ 9am-7pm Tue-Sat, 9am-1pm Sun), about 500m east of the archaeological zone, shows off the region's history going back to prehistoric times and includes a dizzying array of Greek and Roman artefacts.

Sleeping & Eating

Fontane Bianche (☎ 0931 79 03 33; Via dei Lidi 476; per person/tent €6/4.50; ♻️ May-Sep) About 15km southwest of town, this camping ground is near a beach that teems with active bars come summer; catch bus 21 or 22 from Corso Umberto I.

Sogno Sostedo (☎ 0931 217 75; www.sognosostedo.net; Via Logoteta 18; s/d/tr/q €50/70/95/120; ☒) Two comfortable rooms in a private home located perfectly near the centre of Ortygia on a quiet side street; a huge Sicilian breakfast is included.

B&B Casa Mia (☎ 0931 46 33 49; www.bbcasamia.it; Corso Umberto 112; s/d incl breakfast €45/75; ☒ ☑) Many readers have written in with high marks, even though it is across the river from Ortygia. The seven rooms all contain grand antiques, but the main draw here is the home-made pastries and jam breakfast served on the pleasant terrace.

Castello Fiorentino (☎ 0931 21 097; Via del Crocifisso 6, trav Via Roma; pizzas from €3.50) Young Syracusans flock to this restaurant mostly for its pizza, piled high with ingredients like caviar, potatoes or smoked salmon.

For scrumptious Sicilian sweets, head to **Pasticceria Tipica Catanese** (Corso Umberto 46); for good local wines, accompanied by hearty cheese and ham platters, try **Fermento** (Via Crocifisso 44/46), a terrific vaulted wine bar located in the heart of *passaggiata* territory.

Getting There & Away

Services with **Interbus** (☎ 0931 667 10) leave from Via Trieste for Catania (€4.60, one hour, hourly Monday to Saturday) and continue on to Palermo (€14.20, four hours). The service for Rome (€38, 12 hours) also leaves from here, connecting with the Rome bus at Catania. **AST** (☎ 0931 46 48 20) buses service the town and the surrounding area from Riva della Posta.

Trains head from the Piazza della Stazione to Taormina (€6.60, one hour, nine per day), Messina (€8.75, three hours, nine daily), Catania (€8.10, one to 1½ hours, hourly except 8.50am to 12.45pm). Change in Catania or Messina for Palermo (€15, six hours, seven per day) and change in Catania for Agrigento (€12.70, 5½ hours, 6am and 10.45am).

AGRIGENTO

pop 55,900

Agrigento would hardly be on the tourist map if not for the absolutely stunning Greek temples strewn along a ridge below town. Founded around 581 BC, Agrigento was one of ancient Greece's great cities. The city proper is rather sprawling, but the medieval centre isn't bad and the ruins are a quick bus ride away.

There's a so-so **tourist office** (☎ 0922 204 54; Via Cesare Battisti 15; ☎ 8.30am-1.30pm Mon-Fri). Buses 1 and 3 (€0.85) head between town, the Piazza Stazione (train station), the archaeological museum and Valley of the Temples, and bus 2 continues on to the beach of San Leone and camping.

Sights

Agrigento's **Valley of the Temples** (☎ 0922 261 91; admission €6, with museum €10; ☎ 8.30am-10.30pm Jul & Aug, 8.30am-7pm Sep-Oct & Mar-Jun, 8.30am-1hr before sunset Nov-Feb) is one of the major Greek archaeological sights in the world. The ancient Greek town of Agrakas was founded here in 581 BC, during the 50th Olympiad. The only temple to survive relatively intact was **Tempio della Concordia**, transformed into a church. **Tempio di Giunone**, a short walk uphill to the east, has an impressive sacrificial altar. **Tempio di Ercole** is the oldest of the structures and equivalent in size to the Parthenon. Nearby is the **Tempio di Castore e Polluce**, partly reconstructed in the 19th century.

Cross the road to visit the imposing **Tempio di Giove**, mostly in ruins now but one of its *telamoni* (giant male statues) is perfectly preserved and on display in the museum.

Head first to the **Museo Archeologico** (☎ 0922 40 15 65; admission €10 incl Valley of the Temples; ☎ 9am-7pm Tue-Sat, until 10.30pm Jul-Sep, 9am-1pm Sun & Mon all year), just north of the temples on Via dei Templi, a practically perfect museum with examples of *telamoni*.

Sleeping & Eating

Camping Valle dei Templi (☎ 0922 41 11 15; campingvalledeiempli.com; Viale Emporium 192, San Leone; per person/tent/car €7/5.50/3; ☑) A pool, bocce court, games, babysitting and a pizzeria make this a good location for those with kids. It's just past the Valley of the Temples and bungalows are available.

B&B Atenea 191 (☎ 0922 59 55 94; www.atenea191.com; Via Atenea 191; s/d/tr/q incl breakfast €50/80/120/160; ☒) Located on a vivacious shopping street with an ocean view to end all views. Take breakfast (freshly baked pastries) on the patio of the 17th-century building for a holiday treat.

Bella Napoli (☎ 0922 204 35; www.hotelbellanapoli.com; Piazza Lena 6; s/d €35/65) The only low-priced hotel in the city centre, Bella Napoli has rooms that are comfortable but could use a good cleaning.

Cappriccio del Mare (☎ 0922 41 17 61; Via Crispi; pizza/1st courses/2nd courses €5/9/14) Come to this local hangout to get your fill of Sicilian fish specialties like spaghetti with clams and the *antipasto della casa* – smoked fish and *caponata*.

Café Girasole (Via Atenea 68-70) A great little wine bar in the heart of the medieval town.

Getting There & Away

Intercity buses leave from Piazza Rosselli, just off Piazza Vittorio Emanuele, for Palermo (€11.50, two hours, four daily).

SARDINIA

Sardinia (Sardegna in Italian) is geographically distinct from mainland Italy as it is culturally. Sardinia's ancient history goes back millennia before Rome. Palaeolithic inhabitants built settlements still evident today in the form of circular stone fortresses called *nuraghe*, about 7000 of which remain scattered on the island. Despite constant domination by Phoenicians, Romans, Pisans, Genovese and Spaniards (among others), the proud locals, known as Sardi, have retained a strong sense of identity.

Although a few towns are easy to reach by public transport, Sardinia's main draw – its beaches and *nuraghe* – really require your own wheels.

Getting There & Away

The main transport company, **Tirrenia** (www.tirrenia.com, in Italian), runs a service between Cagliari and Trapani, Palermo, Civitavecchia and Naples; between Olbia and Genoa or Civitavecchia; between Arbatax and Fiumicino, Civitavecchia or Genoa; from Golfo Aranci to Fiumicino; and from Porto Torres to Genoa. **Linea dei Golfi** (www.lineaiegolfi.it) runs ferries between Cagliari and Livorno; and Olbia and Piombino or Livorno. The national railway, Ferrovie dello Stato (FS), also runs a service between Civitavecchia and Golfo Aranci. **Moby Lines** (www.mobylines.it) operates services between Olbia and Civitavecchia, Livorno or Genoa, and Santa Teresa di Gallura and Bonifacio on Corsica. **Corsica Ferries** (www.corsicaferries.com) operates services from Golfo Aranci to Civitavecchia or Livorno. **Grandi Navi Veloci** (www.gnv.it) runs a service between Porto Torres or Olbia and Genoa.

To check all ferry services in the Mediterranean, go to traghettonline.net. For flight information, check the individual towns.

CAGLIARI

pop 175,200

The capital and largest city on Sardinia, Cagliari (*Cal-yar-ee*) offers several days of history within its medieval centre, as well as a few day trips to neighbouring beaches and even salt lakes filled with bathing pink flamingoes.

Orientation

The main port, bus and train stations are near Piazza Matteotti, where the useful city tourist office is as well. The main street along the harbour is Via Roma and the old city stretches up the hill behind it to the castle.

Information

Guardia Medica (☎ 070 50 29 31; Via Taleta 6) For after-hours emergencies.

Ospedale San Giovanni di Dio (☎ 070 60 92 215; Via Ospedale) Hospital.

Police station (Questura; ☎ 070 60 271; Via Amat 9) Tucked behind the imposing law courts.

Post office (Piazza del Carmine 27; ☎ 8.30am-6.30pm Mon-Fri, to 1.20pm Sat)

Tourist office (☎ 070 66 92 55; Piazza Matteotti 9; ☎ 9am-2pm & 3-6pm Mon-Sat) Call ahead, as it might move in 2007 or 2008. There are additional information offices at the airport.

World Link Center (Via Cavour 47; ☎ 9am-10.30pm; per 30min €1) Internet.

Sights & Activities

In the Citadella dei Musei, the **Museo Archeologico Nazionale** (☎ 070 68 40 00; Piazza Arsenale; admission €4; ☎ 9am-8pm Tue-Sun) has a fascinating collection of Nuraghe bronzes. These bronzes are objects found in stone constructions all over Sardinia (there are about 7000), a legacy of the island's native culture.

It's enjoyable to simply wander through the medieval quarter. The Pisan-Romanesque **Duomo** (Piazza Palazzo) was built in the 13th century and has an interesting Romanesque pulpit.

There are good sea and city views from **Bastione San Remy** (Piazza Costituzione) in the town's centre, which once formed part of the fortifications of the old city. Now it's a great hangout spot, with ice skating in winter and outdoor cafés in summer.

The **Torre di San Pancrazio** (Piazza Indipendenza; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is also worth a look. The **Roman amphitheatre** (Viale Buon Cammino; admission free; ☎ 9am-5pm Tue-Sun) is considered the most important Roman monument in Sardinia. During summer, opera is performed here.

A day on the **Spaggia di Poetto**, east of the centre, is a day well spent, and you can wander across to the salt lakes to view the flamingoes.

Festivals & Events

The **Festival of Sant'Efisio**, a colourful celebration mixing the secular and the religious, is held annually for four days from 1 May.

Sleeping

Bed & Breakfast La Marina (☎ 070 67 00 65, mobile 349 17 67 368; www.la-marina.it; Via Porcile 23; s €35 d €60-70; 🏠) All four rooms come with private bath and use of the shared kitchen and eating area.

Albergo Aurora (☎ 070 65 86 25; www.hotelcagliari.aurora.it; Salita Santa Chiara 19 at Piazza Yenne; s/d €45/65, s/d without bathroom €35/48; 🏠 €8) The brightly coloured interiors offer a cheery holiday spot, and some have views of the old city.

Hotel A&R Bundes Jack Vittoria (☎ /fax 070 66 79 70; hotel.aerbundesjack@libero.it; Via Roma 75; s/d €47/72, with shared bathroom €40/60) The Marina's choice spot has a warm welcome and high-ceilinged rooms that are spotless, comfortable and face the port.

Eating

Café All'Angolo (☎ 070 65 23 54; Via Porcile 13/A; ☎ closed Sun) Not just an ordinary bar, it also serves the cheapest meals in town, with pasta dishes for €4.50. Try the home-made vegetarian lasagne with bechamel sauce.

Lillicu (☎ 070 65 29 70; Via Sardegna 78; 1st/2nd courses €7.50/11) An authentic trattoria that's often packed with happy locals downing good seafood dishes at large communal marble tables.

The Marina area is riddled with good little spots to suit all tastes and budgets. Also worth a mention are **Antico Caffé** (Piazza Costituzione), Cagliari's most elegant café with a terrace and marble-topped tables; and **Brasserie Vecchia Bruxelles** (Via Sulcis 4; ☎ Mon-Sat), with stone vaults and long comfy sofas – an excellent choice for a beer, snack or nip of whisky.

Getting There & Around

Northwest at Elmas is Cagliari's **airport** (code CAG; ☎ 070 210 51; www.aerportodicagliari.com). Take an ARST bus (€1) from Piazza Matteotti.

In connection with Ryanair, **Logudoro Tours** (☎ 079 28 17 28) runs a service between the Alghero airport and Cagliari (€12.50, four hours; one to three per day depending on season).

The main **Trenitalia** (☎ 89 20 21) train station faces Piazza Matteotti, with regular services to Oristano (€4.80, two hours) and Sassari (€12.70, 4¼ hours). The private **Ferrovie della Sardegna** (FdS; ☎ 070 49 13 04) train station is in Piazza Repubblica and heads to smaller regions, including the tourist route **Trenino Verde**, which runs through breathtaking scenery around Nuoro. FdS has taken over the PANI bus services to Alghero (€14.50, 4½ hours, nine daily), Sassari (€15, 3¼ hours, four daily) and Nuoro (€6.10, 3½ hours, daily at 6.15pm), all from Piazza Matteotti. **ARST** (☎ 800 86 50 42) buses services nearby towns, the Costa del Sud and the Costa Rei.

Ferries arrive at the port adjacent to Via Roma. Bookings for **Tirrenia** (☎ 070 66 60 65; ☎ 8.30am-12.30pm & 3.30pm-6.50pm Mon-Fri) can be made at the Stazione Marittima in the port area.

For rental cars, try **Hertz** (☎ 070 66 81 05; Piazza Matteotti 1), which also has a branch at the airport, while **Autonoleggio Cara** (☎ 070 66 34 71) can deliver a scooter or bike to your hotel.

ALGHERO

pop 43,387

Although the narrow lanes and stone defence ramparts set up a charming coastal holiday spot, Alghero is a fairly new town in comparison to other Mediterranean lands. The Genovese founded it in the 11th century and it was Catalan-controlled for hundreds of years. Hearing the Catalan dialect amid tourists arriving from new low-cost airline routes, you'd swear you were in a resort on the Spanish Costa Brava, just with more pasta and gelato.

Orientation

Alghero's historic centre is on a small promontory jutting into the sea, with the new town stretching out behind and along the coast north.

Information

Main post office (Via Carducci 35; ☎ 8.15am-6.15pm

Mon-Fri, 8.15am-1pm Sat)

Ospedale Civile (☎ 079 98 71 61; Via Don Minzoni) Hospital.

Tourist office (☎ 079 97 90 54; www.infoalghero.it, in Italian; Piazza Porta Terra 9; ☎ 8am-8pm Mon-Sat) Near the port and just across the gardens from the bus station, this is an exceedingly helpful office.

Sights & Activities

The narrow streets of the old city and around the port are lovely. The most interesting church is the **Chiesa di San Francesco** (Via Carlo Alberto; ☎ 7.30am-noon & 5-8.30pm). Although constant remodelling has ruined the cathedral, the **bell tower** (admission €1.50; ☎ 7am-9.30pm Easter-Sep) remains a fine example of Gothic-Catalan architecture.

OUT OF TOWN

If you're prepared for the 654 steps down, head out towards **Capo Caccia** to witness the **Grotte di Nettuno** (☎ 079 94 65 40; admission adult/reduced €10/5; ☎ 9am-7pm Apr-Sep, 10am-5pm Oct, 9am-4pm Nov-Mar), an underground fairyland. Outside of low season, it's also accessible by the ferry company **Navisarda** from the port (adult/reduced €12/6, 2½-hour round-trip), which runs hourly from 9am to 5pm June to September, and from 10am to 3pm April, May and October. An FdS bus from the Via Catalogna bus stop (€4 return, 50 minutes, three daily trips June to September) also does the trip.

If you have a car, don't miss the **Nuraghe di Palmavera** (☎ 079 95 32 00; admission €2.10; ☎ 9am-7pm), 3500-year-old stone ruins 10km out of Alghero on the road to Porto Conte.

Rugged cliffs stretch down to solitary beaches, and near **Bosa** is one of the last habitats of the griffon vulture. The best way to see the coast is by car or motorcycle. If you want to rent a bicycle for the day (from €7) or motorcycle (from €70) to explore the coast, try **Cicloexpress** (☎ 079 98 69 50; Via Garibaldi) at the port.

Festivals & Events

In summer Alghero stages a music festival in the cloisters of the church of San Francesco. A festival, complete with fireworks display, is held on 15 August for the Feast of the Assumption.

GETTING INTO TOWN

To get to the town centre from the airport, take the city FdS buses (€0.70, 10 per day) to Piazza della Mercede.

Sleeping & Eating

It is virtually impossible to find a room in August unless you book in advance, and you'd do best to book ahead for June or July, just in case. There is only one hotel in the historic centre.

Camping La Mariposa (☎ 079 95 03 60; Via Lido 22; per person/tent €10.50/5, bungalows up to €72; ☎ Apr-Oct) About 2km north of the centre, this low-key camping ground is on the beach.

Hotel San Francesco (☎ /fax 079 98 03 30; www.sanfrancescohotel.com; Via Ambrogio Machin 2; s/d/tr incl breakfast €58/92/120; 🏠) The only hotel in the ambient town centre, it has passable levels of charm in simple rooms housed in a former convent.

Trattoria Maristella (☎ 079 97 81 72; Via Fratelli Kennedy 9; 1st/2nd courses €7.50/11; ☎ closed Sun dinner) The most popular spot with locals, with Mediterranean-splashed décor and chatting families, offers good value, reliable grub and alfresco dining.

Focacce Sarde Ripiene (Via Garibaldi 11; ☎ until 1.30am) Serves delicious sandwiches, fronts the sea and is always packed with locals.

Caffé Costantino (Piazza Civica 30) A classy coffee stop in the historic centre that also serves good wine and tantalising cakes.

Getting There & Away

Alghero's **airport** (code AHO; ☎ 079 93 60 51; www.algheroairport.it) is extremely popular with the low-cost airlines Ryanair and Air One, as well as Alitalia and British Airways. To reach Alghero, take the Logudoro bus from Cagliari (€18, 4¼ hours, one to three daily, depending on season) or connect in Sassari by bus or train. There are hourly buses to Sassari (€3 or €3.50, 50 minutes, hourly between 5.35am and 7.50pm) or train (€1.80, 35 minutes, 11 daily). The bus stop is located just next to the public gardens in the old town on Via Catalogna. To get to the train station about 1km to the southeast, take the yellow city buses (€0.80).

ITALY DIRECTORY

ACCOMMODATION

The bulk of Italy's accommodation consists of *alberghi* (hotels) and *pensioni*. Prices vary enormously (a reduction of 30% in low season is not unheard of) but expect to pay high season rates at Easter, in summer and

over the Christmas–New Year period. Note, however, that many city centre hotels offer discounts in the month of August. Tourist offices have listings for all local accommodation.

As a rough guide, bank on €40 to €120 for a double room in a one-star hotel and between €50 to €150 for a double room in a two-star hotel.

Agriturismo & B&Bs

Dotted around the countryside *agriturismi* (farm stays) are increasingly popular. Accommodation varies from cheap billets on working farms to palatial rural retreats. Most, however, are difficult to get to without a car. For information check out **Agritourist** (www.agritourist.it).

Bed and breakfasts (B&B) are also popular. Prices are typically between €70 and €150 for a room. Contact **Bed & Breakfast Italia** (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 688 01 513; www.bbitalia.it; Corso Vittorio Emanuele II 282, 00186 Rome) for more information.

Camping

Camping is well catered for in Italy with camping grounds scattered across the country. Lists of grounds are available from tourist offices or online at www.campeggi.com or www.camping.it. The **Touring Club Italiano** (TCI; www.touringclub.it) also publishes an annual guide called *Campeggi in Italia*. Expect to pay from €5 to €12 per person and €5 to €12 for a site. Note that independent camping is not permitted in many places.

Hostels

You'll find *ostelli per la gioventù* (youth hostels) all over the country. They are run by the **Italian Youth Hostel Association** (Associazione Italiana Alberghi per la Gioventù; AIG; Map p634; ☎ 06 487 11 52; www.ostellionline.org; Via Cavour 44, Rome), which is affiliated with **Hostelling International** (HI; www.ihf.org). A valid HI card is required, which you can get in your home country or at many hostels. Accommodation is in segregated dormitories, although some hostels offer higher-priced doubles. Rates are typically between €15 and €25, with breakfast often included. Many places also offer dinner for around €10. Lockout times are usually from 9am to 5pm; check-in between 6pm and 10.30pm. Curfews typically start around midnight.

Mountain Refuges

Italy boasts an extensive network of mountain *rifugi* (refuges). Open from July to September, they offer basic dorm-style accommodation, although some have double rooms. Reckon on €16 to €30 per person per night (breakfast usually included). **Club Alpino Italiano** (www.cai.it; in Italian) runs many mountain refuges.

Religious Accommodation

A reliable money-saver, religious accommodation is widely available. For a basic double room in a convent or monastery you'll pay about €75. The **Chiesa di Santa Susanna** (www.santasusanna.org/comingToRome/convents.html) has a list of options throughout the country.

ACTIVITIES

Cycling

The scenic back-roads of Tuscany and Umbria are popular cycling areas. Elsewhere, there's excellent mountain-biking in the Alps, Sardinia and Sicily.

Lonely Planet's *Cycling in Italy* offers practical tips and several detailed itineraries. Tourist offices carry information on trails, guided rides and rentals.

Skiing

Most of the country's top resorts are in the Alps, although there are excellent facilities throughout the Apennines. Skiing isn't cheap and high-season rates (applicable Christmas to early January, and February to April) will hurt. You'll save a bit buying a *settimana bianca* (literally 'white week') package deal covering seven days' accommodation, food and ski passes.

Trekking & Walking

Thousands of kilometres of *sentieri* (marked trails) crisscross Italy, ranging from hardcore mountain treks to gentle lakeside ambles. There are plenty of organised trekking trips, but solo trekkers will find easy-to-follow trails and refuges.

In season (the end of June to September), the Dolomites (p669) are a favourite destination. Other areas include the Cinque Terre (p649), Amalfi Coast (p688) and Mt Etna in Sicily (p695).

Useful websites include www.cai.it (in Italian) and www.parks.it. Lonely Planet's *Walking in Italy* has descriptions of more than 50 walks.

BUSINESS HOURS

Although many variations exist, the following are standard hours:

Banks (☎) 8.30am–1.30pm & 2.45pm–4.30pm Mon–Fri

Bars & Cafés (☎) 7.30am–8pm Many open earlier and some stay open until the small hours. Pubs often open noon to 2am.

Discos & Clubs (☎) 10pm–4am Action rarely starts much before midnight.

Pharmacies (☎) 8.30am–1pm & 4pm–7.30pm Mon–Fri, until 1pm Sat) Outside of these hours, they open on a rotation basis. All are legally required to post a list of places open in the vicinity.

Post offices Major offices (☎) 8.30am–6pm Mon–Fri, until 1pm Sat) branch offices (☎) 8.30am–1.50pm Mon–Fri & 8.30am–11.50am Sat)

Restaurants (☎) noon–3pm & 7.30pm–11pm, later in summer) By law restaurants close one day a week; many also close for two weeks in August.

Shops (☎) 9am–1pm & 3.30pm–7.30pm, or 4–8pm Mon–Sat) Many chain stores and supermarkets open 9am to 7.30pm Mon–Sat; some also 11am to 1pm and 4pm to 7pm Sun. Food shops generally close on Thursday afternoons; others often on Monday mornings.

Tourist offices (☎) 8.30am–12.30pm & 3–7pm Mon–Fri) In major cities, offices usually open all day; elsewhere opening times vary.

EMBASSIES & CONSULATES Embassies & Consulates in Italy

Listed are the foreign embassies in Rome:

Australia (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 85 27 21, emergencies 800 87 77 90; www.italy.embassy.gov.au; Via Antonio Bosisio 5, 00161; ☎ 8.30am–5pm Mon–Fri)

Canada (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 44 59 81; www.canada.it; Via G B de Rossi 27, 00161; ☎ 8.30am–4.30pm Mon–Fri)

France (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 68 60 11; www.france-italia.it; Piazza Farnese 67, 00168; ☎ 9am–12.30pm Mon–Fri)

Germany (Map p634; ☎ 06 49 21 31; www.rom.diplo.de; Via San Martino della Battaglia 4, 00185; ☎ 8.30–11.30am Mon–Fri)

Ireland (Map pp640-1; ☎ 06 697 91 21; www.ambasciata-irlanda.it; Piazza Campitelli 3, 00186; ☎ 10am–1pm Mon–Fri)

Netherlands (☎ 06 36 76 71; www.olanda.it; Via della Camiluccia 701, 00135; ☎ 9am–noon Mon, Tue, Thu & Fri) North of Villa Borghese.

New Zealand (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 441 71 71; www.nzembassy.com; Via Zara 28, 00198; ☎ 8.30am–12.45pm & 1.45–5pm Mon–Fri)

UK (Map pp632-3; ☎ 06 422 00 001; www.britishembassy.gov.uk; Via XX Settembre 80a, 00187; ☎ 9.15am–1.30pm Mon–Fri)

USA (Map pp636-7; ☎ 06 4 67 41; www.usis.it; Via Vittorio Veneto 119a, 00187; ☎ 8.30am–12.30pm & 2–5.30pm Mon–Fri)

There are also British and US consulates in many major cities.

Italian Embassies & Consulates Abroad

Italian diplomatic missions:

Australia Canberra (☎ 02-6273 3333; www.ambitalia.org.au; 12 Grey St, Deakin ACT 2600); Melbourne (☎ 03-9867 5744; consolatogenerale.melbourne@esteri.it; 509 St Kilda Rd VIC 3004); Sydney (☎ 02-9392 7900; itconsyd@itconsyd.org; Level 45, The Gateway, 1 Macquarie Pl, NSW 2000)

Canada Ottawa (☎ 613-232 2401; www.italyincanada.com; 21st fl, 275 Slater St, Ontario, K1P 5H9); Montreal (☎ 514-849 8351; www.italconsul.montreal.qc.ca; 3489 Drummond St, Quebec H3G 1X6); Vancouver (☎ 604-684 7288; www.italianconsulate.bc.ca; Standard Bldg 1100-510 West Hastings St, BC V6B 1L8)

France (☎ 01 49 54 03 00; www.ambparigi.esteri.it; 7 rue de Varenne, Paris, 75343)

Germany (☎ 030-254 400; www.ambberlino.esteri.it; Hiroshima Strasse 1, Berlin, 10785)

Ireland (☎ 01-660 1744; www.italianembassy.ie; 63-65 Northumberland Rd, Dublin 4)

Netherlands (☎ 070-302 10 30; www.ambblaja.esteri.it; Alexanderstraat 12, The Hague, 2514 JL)

New Zealand (☎ 04-494 7170; www.ambwellington.esteri.it; 34 Grant Rd, Thorndon, Wellington)

UK London (☎ 020-7312 2200; www.amblondra.esteri.it; 14 Three Kings Yard, W1K 4EH); Edinburgh (☎ 0131-2263 631; consedimb.demon.co.uk/index1.htm; 32 Melville St, EH3 7HA)

USA Washington (☎ 202-612 4400; www.italyemb.org; 3000 Whitehaven St, NW Washington, DC 20008); Los Angeles (☎ 310-826 62 07; la.italcons@itwash.org; Suite 300, 12400 Wilshire Blvd, 90025); New York (☎ 212-737 9100; www.italconsulnyc.org; 690 Park Ave, 10021)

FESTIVALS & EVENTS

Italy's most famous festivals and events:

Carnevale Many towns stage carnivals in the period before Ash Wednesday. The best known is in Venice (see p663).

Settimana Santa Holy Week is celebrated with processions and Passion plays.

Scoppio del Carro Fireworks show in Florence's Piazza del Duomo on Easter Saturday (see p673).

Palio delle Quattro Antiche Repubbliche Marinare (Regatta of the Four Ancient Maritime Republics) Boat races between the four historical maritime republics – Pisa, Venice, Amalfi and Genoa. The event rotates between the towns and is usually held in June.

Il Palio On 2 July and 16 August, Siena stages its extraordinary horse race (see p678)

Natale In the run-up to Christmas there are numerous processions and religious events. Many churches set up elaborate nativity scenes known as *presepe* – Naples is famous for these.

HOLIDAYS

Public holidays:

Epifania (Epiphany) 6 January

Pasquetta (Easter Monday) March/April

Giorno della Liberazione (Liberation Day) 25 April

Festa del Lavoro (Labour Day) 1 May

Festa della Repubblica (Republic Day) 2 June

Ferragosto (Feast of the Assumption) 15 August

Ognisanti (All Saints' Day) 1 November

Immacolata Concezione (Feast of the Immaculate Conception) 8 December

Natale (Christmas Day) 25 December

Festa di Santo Stefano (Boxing Day) 26 December

Individual towns also celebrate their patron saints:

Festa di San Marco (Feast of St Mark; Venice) 25 April

Festa di San Giovanni (Feast of St John the Baptist; Florence, Genoa and Turin) 24 June

Festa di San Pietro e San Paolo (Feast of St Peter and St Paul; Rome) 29 June

Festa di Santa Rosalia (Feast of St Rosalia; Palermo) 15 July

Festa di San Gennaro (Feast of St Januarius; Naples) first Sunday in May, 19 September and 16 December

Festa di Sant' Ambrogio (Feast of St Ambrose; Milan) 7 December

INTERNET RESOURCES

www.enit.it Comprehensive site of the Italian tourist board.

www.traghettonline.com Everything you need to know about Italian ferries.

www.trenitalia.it Plan, book and check on Italy's railway site.

www.vatican.va The Vatican's official website.

MONEY

Italy's currency is the euro. The best way to manage funds is to use your debit/credit cards while keeping a fistful of travellers cheques as backup. Visa and MasterCard are widely recognised, as are Cirrus and Maestro; American Express is accepted but is less common. Credit and debit cards can be used in *bancomat* (ATMs) displaying the appropriate sign. If you don't have a PIN, some (but not all) banks will advance cash over the counter.

Visa, Travelex and Amex are the most widely accepted travellers cheques, although changing even these in smaller cities can be difficult. You'll find exchange offices at major airports and train stations.

You're not expected to tip on top of restaurant service charges, but if you think the service warrants it feel free to leave a little extra – 10% is fine. In bars, Italians often leave small change (€0.10 or €0.20).

POST

Italy's **Poste** (☎ 803 160; www.poste.it, in Italian) is not a model of efficiency. The best service to use is *posta prioritaria* (priority mail). Registered mail is known as *raccomandato*, insured mail as *assicurato* and express post as *postacelere*.

Stamps (*francobolli*) are available at post offices and tobacconists (*tabacchi*).

TELEPHONE

The international access code for Italy is ☎ 00; the country code is ☎ 39. Mobile phone numbers begin with a three-digit prefix such as 330 or 339. You must always dial the area code in Italy, even when calling locally.

To make a reverse-charge (collect) international call, dial ☎ 170.

Local and long-distance calls can be made from Telecom offices or public phones – you'll need a *scheda telefonica* (telephone card), available from tobacconists and newsstands. The cheapest time to call is from midnight to 8am and all of Sunday.

VISAS

EU citizens don't need a visa to enter Italy and, with a *permesso di soggiorno* (permit to stay), can stay as long as they like. Nationals of Australia, Canada, Israel, Japan, New Zealand, Switzerland and the USA don't need a visa for stays of up to 90 days.

A *permesso di soggiorno* only really becomes a necessity if you plan to study, work or live in Italy. Technically, all EU citizens who stay in Italy longer than three months and all non-EU nationals require one. Non-EU citizens who want to study must also obtain a study visa from their nearest Italian embassy or consulate.

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