

Culinary flourishes



Le Pergola

Perhaps because of the wealth of great food on offer out in the streets of Rome, the city's hotels have (with one exception) rarely excelled on the culinary front.

But top-ranking chefs have, of late, come round to the concept of hotel cuisine, and four of Rome's top eateries are now in hotels.

La Pergola (Rome Cavalieri, via Cadlolo 101, 06 35 091, www.romecavalieri.it, dinner for two €400 plus wine) is a Rome classic, and the only restaurant in the city to boast three Michelin stars. It's set high on Monte Mario – but with food like this on your plate, even the superb views pale into insignificance. German chef Heinz Beck creates an ever-changing menu of daring perfection: utterly fresh and flavoursome. There's also an award-winning wine cellar.

Alfonso Iaccarino's **baby** (via U Aldrovandi 15, 06 321 6126, www.aldrovandi.com, dinner for two €220 plus wine), the poolside restaurant inside Hotel Aldrovandi, brings all the wondrous flavours of the chef's southern Campania region to the capital. Iaccarino's Don Alfonso restaurant above

the Amalfi Coast has two Michelin stars; in 2009, baby got one too. Organic ingredients from his farms are on the plate at both venues.

Chef Francesco Aprea began his cooking career at the Hassler hotel, then worked at top-flight kitchens in London (Le Gavroche) and Tokyo before returning to the Hassler as executive chef, and overseeing the rebirth of its rooftop restaurant as **Imàgo** (piazza Trinità dei Monti 6, 06 6993 4726, www.imagorestaurant.com, dinner for two €190 plus wine) in 2006. His dishes abound with the freshest of vegetables, and his travels tell on this Italian menu with a difference.

Bursting on to the foodie scene in spring 2009, with his irrepressible Sicilian ebullience, news-photographer-turned-chef Filippo La Mantia left his post at the Trattoria restaurant in the *centro storico* to take the reins at the **Hotel Majestic** (via V Veneto 50, 06 421 441, www.rome-hotels-majestic.com, dinner for two €150 plus wine). La Mantia is known for his delicate touch and Sicilian approach, using citrus as a keynote in place of garlic and onion.

Vatican give on to the busy retail thoroughfares of **Prati**: it's lively during the day but hushed at night.

Booking a room

Always reserve a room well in advance, especially at peak times – which now means most of the year, with lulls during winter (January to March) and in the dog days of August. If you're coming at the same time as a major Christian holiday (Christmas or Easter) it's advisable to book weeks, or even months, ahead.

Booking is almost always via hotel websites, but smaller places may ask for a fax confirming a booking, with a credit card number as deposit. The www.venere.com booking service offers hotels in all price ranges. **Hotel Reservation** (06 699 1000, www.hotelreservation.it), which has desks at Fiumicino airport, Ciampino airport and at Termini station, offers a free booking service.

Avoid the touts that hang around Termini: you're likely to end up paying more than you should for a very grotty hotel.

Standards & prices

Italian hotels are classified on a star system, from one to five. One star usually indicates *pensioni*, which are cheap but have very few facilities; you may have to share a bathroom. The more stars, the more facilities a hotel will have, but bear in mind that a higher rating offers no real guarantee of friendliness, cleanliness or decent service.

Price rises have slowed right down in Rome recently. It's worth keeping an eye out for good deals on hotel websites: many now operate a booking system similar to low-cost airlines, with room prices determined by demand in

any given period. If you're staying in a group or for a longish period, ask about discounts.

If you're visiting with children, most hotels will be happy to squeeze a cot or camp bed into a room, but they will probably charge 30 to 50 per cent extra for the privilege.

Alternative accommodation

If you're travelling with children and/or staying for a while, you might prefer to rent an apartment. Sites such as www.flatinrome.com and www.romanreference.com have many on their books; London-based www.aplaceinrome.com has a delightful few. For B&Bs, check out www.bbitalia.it or www.b-b.rm.it. Both apartments and B&Bs are listed on www.romedowntown.it.

Flaminio Village (via Flaminia Nuova 821, 06 333 2604, www.villageflaminio.it) offers tent pitches, as well as bungalows to rent in landscaped gardens with a large swimming pool and good facilities.

Some religious institutes offer cheap (though not always cheerful) accommodation. Find them through www.monasterystays.com, www.santasusanna.org or www.hospites.it.

Our choice

The hotels listed in this guide have been chosen for their location, because they offer value for money, or simply because they have true Roman character. Unless stated, rates are for rooms with bathrooms, and include breakfast. Our price categories refer to standard double rooms in high season; at quieter times many hotels cut prices by as much as 50 per cent.

In the deluxe category (€€€€) the emphasis is firmly on luxury; a standard double will cost over €400.