

FREE GUIDE

The

KATIE PARLA GUIDE



to

EATING WELL IN ROME

A quick guide to trattorie, pizzerie, and how to dine like a local.



I'M KATIE PARLA,

a Rome-based food and beverage writer, culinary guide, cookbook author, and serious eater since long before I had any of those job titles. If you've ever read one of my books, joined one of my food tours, or fallen into a late-night internet hole about Roman pizza (same), chances are we've crossed paths through a shared obsession with this city's singular food culture.

This isn't a guide about "the best" of Rome. It's a guide about the real Rome. And I'm here to lead you through it, one bite at a time.

After years of researching and writing about Italian food, these are the things travelers most often misunderstand about restaurants in Rome.

UNDERSTANDING ROMAN RESTAURANTS

TRATTORIE

Roman cuisine is known for bold flavors, minimal ingredients, and straightforward technique. These dishes evolved through centuries of poverty, migration, and working-class ingenuity. Even today, the city's restaurants reflect that history.

Trattorie are the backbone of Roman dining. Many began as family businesses decades ago and still serve traditional dishes with a sense of continuity. Some have refined their technique over time, but the goal remains the same: comforting Roman cooking rooted in tradition.

One example is Armando al Pantheon, where the Gargioli family has been serving Roman classics since 1961. The menu focuses on staples like fettuccine with chicken innards, slow-cooked tripe, and seasonal vegetables such as braised artichokes and puntarelle with anchovy dressing.

Other trattorie have evolved without losing their identity. At Cesare al Casaletto, new ownership brought refined cooking techniques while preserving the neighborhood spirit of the place. The result is food that feels traditional but executed with more precision.

When visiting yourself, you don't need to order every course, but it's polite to choose at least two or three, like an antipasto with a secondo and a contorno or a primo followed by a secondo, so the kitchen isn't firing a single plate per table.



Many Roman food spots are family operations

Some popular food stands and shops continue as multi-generation family businesses. For example, the Testaccio Market stall Mordi e Vai was founded by butcher Sergio Esposito and is now run by his son.

TRATTORIE

- Armando al Pantheon (Centro Storico)
- Cesare al Casaletto (Gianicolense)
- Cesare al Pellegrino (Centro Storico)
- Hosteria Grappolo d'Oro (Centro Storico)
- Osteria Bonelli (Tor Pignattara)
- Piatto Romano (Testaccio)
- Tavernaccia da Bruno (Porta Portese)
- Trecca (San Paolo)



UNDERSTANDING ROMAN BAKING

BREAD, PIZZA, AND EVERYDAY BAKERIES

In Italian, forno simply means “oven,” but in Rome it refers to traditional bakeries that produce bread, pizza, and pastries.

Bread has been baked in Rome for thousands of years, but the modern Roman bakery emerged in the mid-twentieth century. Until the 1970s many bakeries used coal-fired ovens and produced only a small selection of breads. After finishing the daily bread baking, residents would often bring their own dishes to cook in the ovens’ remaining heat.

Over time, bakeries expanded their offerings. Pizza bianca and pizza rossa became staples, often baked alla pala—a long slab of dough launched into the oven with a wooden peel. These pizzas can reach several feet long and are typically sold by weight.

Today most forni sell far more than bread. Counters are often filled with pizzette, cookies, jam tarts, and seasonal sweets.

Rome also specializes in wood-fired pizza served in pizzeria, where round pies are served in various versions. The city's pizza tonda is crispy and chewy with barely any rim. There are also some excellent thick-rimmed joints channeling Neapolitan techniques.

PIZZERIE

- Ai Marmi (Trastevere)
- A Rota (Tor Pignattara)
- I Quintili (Tuscolano, EUR)
- La Gatta Mangiona (Monteverde)
- L'Elementare (multiple locations)
- Piccolo Buco (Centro Storico)
- VICO Pizza & Wine (Centro Storico)



A classic Roman bakery snack

One simple local favorite is pizza bianca stuffed with mortadella, a combination of bread, fat, and salt that locals treat as a perfect quick meal or substantial snack.

HOW ROMANS ACTUALLY EAT

STREET FOOD AND QUICK MEALS

Rome's street food culture has evolved significantly in recent decades. **Foods once considered simple snacks**—like supplì or pizza in teglia (sheet pan pizza)—**have become expressions of culinary creativity.**

Supplì, the classic Roman fried rice ball, is now often filled with ingredients like truffle, pumpkin, or slow-cooked oxtail.

Pizza in teglia has also undergone a transformation. Bakers such as Gabriele Bonci helped elevate it by using long-fermented doughs made with stone-milled grains and topping them with highly seasonal ingredients.

Street food counters and casual spots throughout the city serve everything from fried artichokes to sandwiches stuffed with slow-cooked Roman dishes.

At the famous Mordi e Vai stall in Testaccio Market, ciabatta is filled with braised meats and traditional Roman recipes originally developed for family meals.



“You eat standing, leaning, or perched for a minute before moving on. This is the fuel that keeps the city running.”

QUICK BITES

- Amerina (Centro Storico)
- C'è Pasta e Pasta (Trastevere)
- Mordi e Vai (Testaccio)
- Supplizio (Centro Storico)
- Trapizzino (Testaccio, Trastevere, Ponte Milvio, Prati, Esquilino)
- Becco (Trionfale)
- Da Corrado (Testaccio)

KEY ROMAN FOOD TERMS

- **Pescivendolo** – a fishmonger selling catch from Italy and beyond.
- **Mercato rionale** – a neighborhood market where locals shop for everyday ingredients.
- **Fruttivendolo** – a produce vendor who buys wholesale and sells fruits and vegetables.
- **Macellaio** – a butcher selling classic cuts, especially those of suckling lambs and organ meats.

PIZZA IN TEGLIA

- Frumentario (Re di Roma)
- Lievito (EUR)
- Pizzarium (Cipro)
- Ruver Teglia Frazionata (Aventino)
- Nonnarè (Garbatella)
- Pantera (Garbatella)

WORTH A DETOUR FOR A SWEET TREAT

- Andreotti (Ostiense)
- Barnum (Centro Storico)
- Casa Manfredi Teatro (Ostiense)
- Gastromario (San Giovanni)
- Gruè (Nomentano)
- Slow (Centro Storico)
- Luna (Centro Storico)
- Nero Vaniglia (Garbatella)
- Roscioli Caffè (Centro Storico)
- SAID dal 1923 (San Lorenzo)
- Boccione (Ghetto)

GELATO SHOPS WORTH DROOLING FOR

- Al Settimo Gelo (Prati)
- Fatamorgana (Centro Storico, Monti, Trastevere)
- Fior di Luna (Trastevere)
- Formaessenza (Marconi)
- Gelateria dei Gracchi (Prati, Centro Storico, Nomentano)
- Gelateria del Teatro (Centro Storico)
- Gelateria Gori (Piazza Sempione)
- La Gourmandise (Monteverde Vecchio)
- Neve di Latte (Centro Storico, Flaminio, Prati)
- Otaleg! (Trastevere, Monteverde Vecchio)
- Torcè (Aventino, EUR)

ROME'S SWEET STOPS

PASTICCERIE AND GELATERIE

Rome's dessert culture ranges from traditional pastry shops to gelato laboratories pushing creative boundaries.

Modern gelato in Rome has been shaped by influential gelato makers who emphasized natural ingredients and experimentation. One of the most important figures is Claudio Torcè, who trained many of the city's top gelato artisans and became known for producing more than 100 all-natural flavors.

Today, gelato shops may offer both classic flavors like chocolate and crema and more unusual options such as Sichuan pepper or black sesame.

Some gelaterie produce their gelato daily in small laboratories using specialized machines and carefully sourced ingredients. They also specialize in sorbetti made from seasonal fruit, which can be among the most memorable flavors.

Gelato is not Ice Cream

It contains less air, which gives it a dense, smooth texture. It's served slightly warmer than ice cream, so it melts more evenly and delivers flavor more immediately. It also tends to have less fat because it's made with milk (or milk and cream) instead of just cream.



SHOPPING FOR FOOD IN ROME



MARKETS AND SPECIALTY SHOPS

Shopping for food in Rome is deeply tied to daily life. Rather than planning meals far in advance, many Romans buy ingredients based on what looks best that day.

Although supermarkets are common, many people still rely on specialized shops such as butchers, fishmongers, and produce vendors. These stores often maintain relationships of trust with customers who depend on them for quality ingredients.

Neighborhood markets—*mercati rionali*—remain important gathering points. They are primarily places where locals buy ingredients for home cooking rather than destinations for tourists.

Some markets operate outdoors and close early in the afternoon, while others occupy large covered halls or modern structures.

HOW TO ORDER LIKE A LOCAL

You don't need fluent Italian to shop in Rome's markets, but you do need basic manners. Say **"buongiorno"** when you walk up, and **"grazie, arrivederci"** when you leave. That's the bare minimum, and no one's mad if that's all you've got. Between the greetings, pointing and gestures work well, especially if you're smiling. **Nothing disarms a Roman like a grinning foreigner.**

The two most important phrases when it comes to shopping in markets are **"posso?"** (may I?) and **"ci provano sempre"** (they'll always try to get one over on you).

Always ask permission to select your produce before jumping in and manhandling it. Sometimes your "posso" will be met with a stern "no". Other times, the response will be to simply throw a paper bag in your direction as an invitation to start selecting. Use one bag per product.

SHOPPING

- Mercato di Campagna Amica del Circo Massimo (Circo Massimo)
- Mercato di San Giovanni di Dio (Monteverde)
- Mercato Trionfale (Trionfale)
- Mercato Campo Marzio (Centro Storico)
- Nuovo Mercato di Testaccio (Testaccio)
- Nuovo Mercato Esquilino (Esquilino)
- Forme Dispensa a Ripa (Trastevere)
- La Formaggeria (Appio-Latino)
- La Differenza (Appio-Latino)



Romans shop differently than many tourists expect

Roman meals are often built around whatever looks best that day, rather than planned far in advance. Small refrigerators mean people shop more frequently, often visiting markets or specialty shops several times per week.

STAY CONNECTED

If you enjoyed this guide, there's much more to discover.



I share restaurant recommendations, travel tips, and insights into Rome's food culture through my website, along with new guides, seasonal dining ideas, and favorite places across the country.

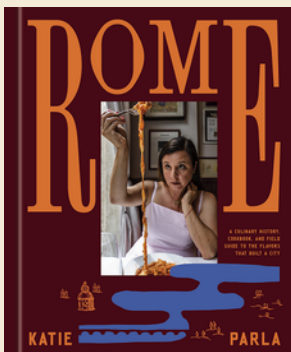
Visit my website to get more insider tips on where and how to eat well in Rome.

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If you're planning a trip, I **offer curated food tours** and culinary experiences designed to help travelers discover Italy through its cuisine. Private tours with me and my team are customized just for you.

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And if you'd like to explore these topics in greater depth, my cookbook ***Rome: A Culinary History, Cookbook, and Field Guide to the Flavors that Built a City*** dives deeper into traditions, stories, and recipes.

[Get Yours](#)

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