
Food in Rome

After their families, their "mamma" and perhaps their cars, eating is the Romans' main preoccupation. Most of their traditional titbits, however — the stuff of poverty and simple peasant cooking — may appear unappetizing to outsiders: brains, tripe, salt cod, chick peas, pigs' trotters, veal and offal; but more conventional staples from most Italian regions can be found in the city's restaurants.

Those searching for more variety will be hard-pushed, though the city boasts hundreds of Chinese and handfuls of Indian and other ethnic restaurants. Dining out for most Romans is all the nightlife they need, and a summer evening's meal "al fresco" can be one of the city's most pleasant experiences. Eating out in Trastevere and the streets around Piazza Navona contain the city's highest concentration of restaurants, though few areas are without their local trattoria and pizzerias, and it is in these — away from the obvious tourist areas — that you will enjoy your liveliest and most reasonably priced meals. It is as well to be aware that in Rome smart and expensive restaurants are no guarantee of good cooking.

Main meals:

breakfast is a straightforward, stand-up affair of sweet and sometimes custard-filled croissant ("cornetto") and coffee or milk and coffee ("cappuccino")

lunch: Lunch these days is not the extended, overblown affair it once was, and many Romans eat a bar snack or light pasta, saving the serious eating for the evening meal usually between 8 and 9.

Traditionally dinner runs through hors d'œuvres, a course of soup, risotto, polenta or pasta, a meat or fish course, dessert and an espresso coffee or bitter digest to round things off. However it is not obligatory to wade through every course. Italian restaurants often fall down at the dessert stage, and Rome's are no exception. Generally it is best to have fresh fruit or a fruit salad rather than the industrial puddings made off the premises. The most common cheese is "pecorino", made from sheep's milk and usually available in mild, medium or mature versions. Many people, Romans and visitors alike, leave the restaurant to buy an ice-cream as part of an evening stroll.