



HEART OF ROME WALK

From Campo de' Fiori to the Spanish Steps

Rome's most colorful neighborhood features narrow lanes, intimate piazzas, fanciful fountains, and some of Europe's best people-watching. During the day, this walk shows off the colorful Campo de' Fiori market and trendy fashion boutiques as it meanders past major monuments such as the Pantheon and the Spanish Steps.

But when the sun sets, unexpected magic happens. A stroll in the cool of the evening brings out all the romance of the Eternal City. Sit so close to a bubbling fountain that traffic noise evaporates. Jostle with kids to see the gelato flavors. Watch lovers straddling more than the bench. Jaywalk past *polizia* in flak-proof vests. And marvel at the ramshackle elegance that softens this brutal city for those who were born here and can't imagine living anywhere else. These are the flavors of Rome, best tasted after dark.

Orientation

Length of This Walk: Allow anywhere from one to three hours for this mile-long walk, depending on whether you linger (yes, do) and tour the Pantheon (another good idea).

When to Go: This walk works well at any time. By day, you can enjoy Campo de' Fiori's morning market and sightsee the Pantheon and surrounding churches. But it's most engaging after dark, when the fountains are lit and the cool evening air brings locals out for the *passaggiata* (for more on this Italian tradition, see the sidebar on page 430).

Getting There: Campo de' Fiori is a few blocks west of Largo Argentina, a major transportation hub. Buses #40, #64, and #492 stop both at Largo Argentina and along Corso Vittorio Emanuele II (a long block northwest of Campo de' Fiori). A taxi from Termini Station costs about €8.

Pantheon: Free, Mon-Sat 8:30-19:30, Sun 9:00-18:00, holidays 9:00-13:00, closed for Mass on Sat at 17:00 and Sun at 10:30.

Other Options: This walk is equally pleasant in reverse order. You could ride the Metro to the Spanish Steps and finish at Campo de' Fiori, near many recommended restaurants. To lengthen this walk, you could start in Trastevere; see directions on page 313.

The Walk Begins

• *Start this walk at Campo de' Fiori, my favorite outdoor dining room (especially after dark—see page 390 in the Eating in Rome chapter).*

Campo de' Fiori

One of Rome's most colorful spots, this bohemian piazza hosts a fruit and vegetable **market** in the morning, cafés in the evening, and pub-crawlers at night. In ancient times, the "Field of Flowers" was an open meadow. Later, Christian pilgrims passed through on their way to the Vatican, and a thriving market developed.



Lording over the center of the square is a statue of **Giordano Bruno**, an intellectual heretic who was burned on this spot in 1600. The pedestal shows scenes from Bruno's trial and execution, and reads, "And the flames rose up." When this statue honoring a heretic was erected in 1889, the Vatican protested, but they were overruled by angry Campo locals. The neighborhood is still known for its free spirit and anti-authoritarian demonstrations.

Campo de' Fiori is the product of centuries of unplanned urban development. At the east end of the square (behind Bruno), the ramshackle apartments are built right into the old outer wall of ancient Rome's mammoth Theater of Pompey. This entertainment complex covered several city blocks, stretching from here to Largo Argentina. Julius Caesar was assassinated in the Theater of Pompey, where the Senate was renting space.

The square is surrounded by fun eateries, and is great for people-watching. Bruno faces the bustling **Forno** (in the left corner of the square, closed Sun), where take-out *pizza bianco* is sold hot out of the oven. On weekend nights, when the Campo is packed with beer-drinking kids, the medieval square is transformed into one vast Roman street party.

Via delle Carrozze is fun to browse, with shops carrying specialties from other parts of Italy (handy if Rome is your only destination): The Santa Maria Novella perfume shop (#87) stocks scents from that famous church-run perfume works in Florence; Il Cerichio dei Goloso (#19) serves delicate pastries—and sells colorful plates—from Sicily; and La Peonia (#85) specializes in products from Sardinia. Also along this stretch, look in the window of the old-time tailor, Attilio Roncaccia (#12), and pick up some stylish fashions for Junior at Gocco (#18).

From **Via dei Condotti**, you can see the Spanish Steps hovering in the distance. This busy, glamorous strip has the same type of high-roller international shops found on Via del Babuino.

For one more taste of a simpler side of this area, find your way a few blocks west (on Via dei Condotti *away* from the Spanish Steps—toward the river, just south of Ara Pacis) to **Piazza Borghese**. This sleepy little square is filled with green kiosks selling prints, antique books, and curios. Shops in the surrounding streets have a similar flavor.

Shopping Triangle Near Via Del Corso & the Spanish

Via del Corso runs south, from Piazza del Popolo to the heart of Rome, and the little streets that poke east off the main drag—toward the Spanish Steps—form an area nicknamed the “shopping triangle.” This zone has big international chains to suit every budget—from Dolce & Gabbana to the Gap—along with some very famous designers...all of which makes it less funky and colorful than the neighborhoods described previously. Nevertheless, a few quirky shops hide out here as well.

Streets Between Via del Corso and Via del Babuino

I’ve described the streets branching off of Via del Corso from north to south, starting at Piazza del Popolo. These are to the left as you walk; the streets to the right have fewer shops. Also note that **Via del Babuino** angles off parallel to Via del Corso, with mostly pricey international chains (Tiffany, Chanel, Dolce & Gabbana, and

so on). See the “Dolce Vita Stroll” map in the Nightlife in Rome chapter for specific locations of these streets.

Via Fontanella isn’t interesting in its own right, but it does lead to the very chichi Via Margutta—described later.

Via Laurina has some funkier shops, including several with youth fashions; halfway down at #10 is the recommended Fatamorgana *gelateria*, and classier galleries and antiques sit at the far end.

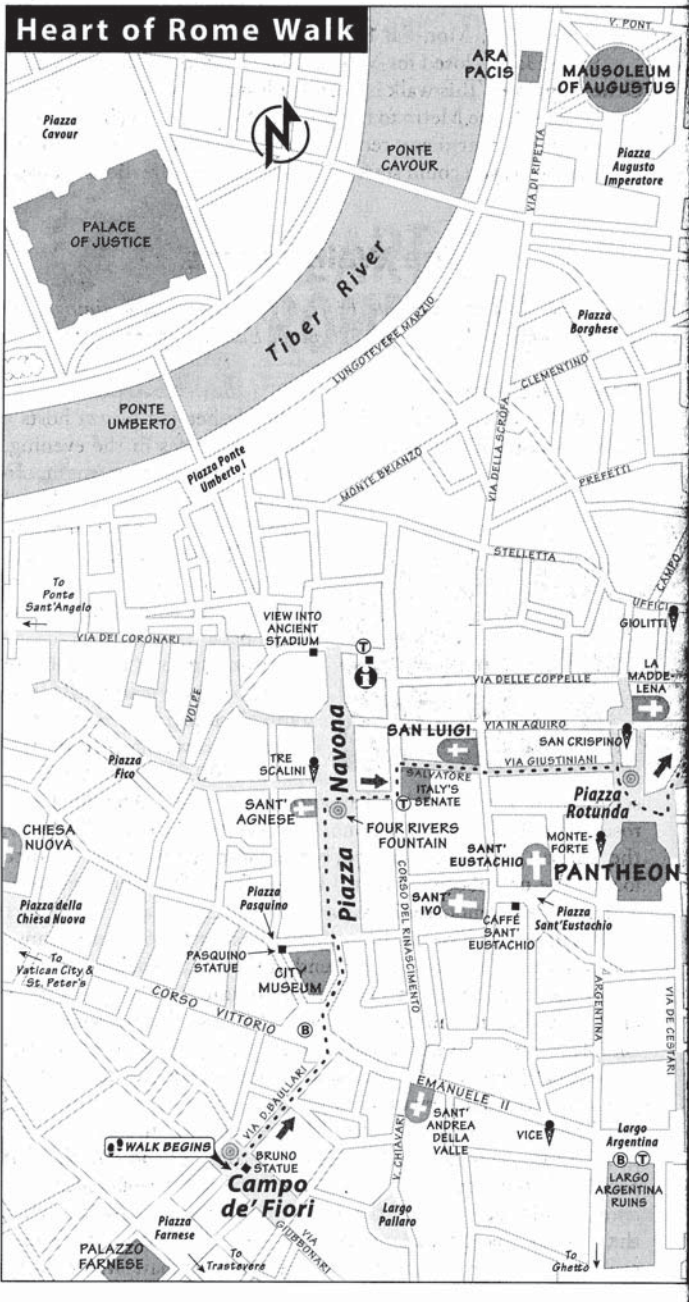
Via di Gesù e Maria, running along its namesake church, has fewer stores. Discount dell’Alta Moda (at #16a, literally “Discount on Old Fashion,” where last year’s big-name designer duds are marked down by half) is a hit with bargain shoppers, while sports fans peruse the store with merchandise promoting the local Lazio soccer team. **Via di San Giacomo**, on the other side of the church, is also fairly sleepy—though it’s fun to peek in the windows of the art school to see the artisans and craftspeople of the 21st century hard at work.

Via del Greci has a sheet music store, antiques, fashion boutiques, and a fragrant flower stall.

Via Vittoria and **Via della Croce** are major thoroughfares for reaching the Spanish Steps, so they have less interesting shops and more touristy crowds; however, Via della Croce is a great place to browse for a meal (see suggestions on page 398). The recommended Pastificio (near the end of the street, at #8) is, true to its name, a pasta factory, where you can buy dry pasta as an edible souvenir.

Some of the streets that run parallel to Via del Corso along here are also fun to wander. For example, **Via Mario de’ Fiori** is crammed with upscale boutiques, but tucked amidst the glitz is the appealing c.u.c.i.n.a. shop (at #65), where you can stock up on Italian-style kitchen gadgets, utensils, and crockery.

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ponder Rome's decay. The British poet John Keats pondered his mortality, then died of tuberculosis at age 25 in the orange building on the right side of the steps. Fellow Romantic Lord Byron lived across the square at #66.

The wide, curving staircase is one of Rome's iconic sights. Its 138 steps lead sharply up from Piazza di Spagna, forming a butterfly shape as they fan out around a central terrace. The design culminates at the top in an obelisk framed between two Baroque church towers.

The Sinking Boat Fountain at the foot of the steps, built by Bernini or his father, Pietro, is powered by an aqueduct. Actually, all of Rome's fountains are aqueduct-powered; their spurts are determined by the water pressure provided by the various aqueducts. This one, for instance, is much weaker than Trevi's gush.

The piazza is a thriving scene at night. Window-shop along Via Condotti, which stretches away from the steps. This is where Gucci and other big names cater to the trendsetting jet set. It's clear that the main sight around here is not the famous steps, but the people who sit on them.

• *Our walk is finished. If you'd like to reach the top of the steps sweat-free, take the free elevator just outside the Spagna Metro stop (to the left, as you face the steps; elevator closes at 21:00). A free WC is underground in the piazza near the Metro entrance, by the middle palm tree (10:00-19:30). The nearby McDonald's (as you face the Spanish Steps, go right one block) is big and lavish, with a salad bar and WC. When you're ready to leave, you can zip home on the Metro (usually open until 23:30, Fri-Sat until 1:30 in the morning) or grab a taxi at either the north or south side of the piazza.*

Egyptian Obelisks

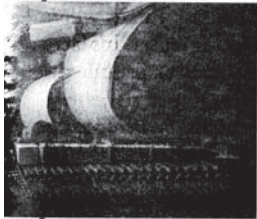
Rome has 13 obelisks, more than any other city in the world. In Egypt, they were connected with the sun god Ra (like stone sun rays) and the power of the pharaohs. The ancient Romans, keen on exotic novelty and sheer size, brought the obelisks here and set them up in key public places as evidence and celebration of their occupation of Egypt. Starting from the 1580s, Rome's new rulers—the popes—relocated the obelisks, often topping them with Christian crosses so they came to acquire yet another significance that guaranteed their survival: the triumph of Christianity over all other religions.

The tallest (105 feet) and the most ancient (16th century B.C.) is the one by San Giovanni in Laterano. It once stood in the Circus Maximus next to its sister, which now marks the center of Piazza del Popolo.



The obelisks were carved out of single blocks of granite. Imagine the work, with only man and horsepower, first to quarry them and set them up in Egypt, then—after the Romans came along—to roll them on logs to the river or the coast, sail (or row) them in special barges across the Mediterranean and up the Tiber, and finally hoist them up.

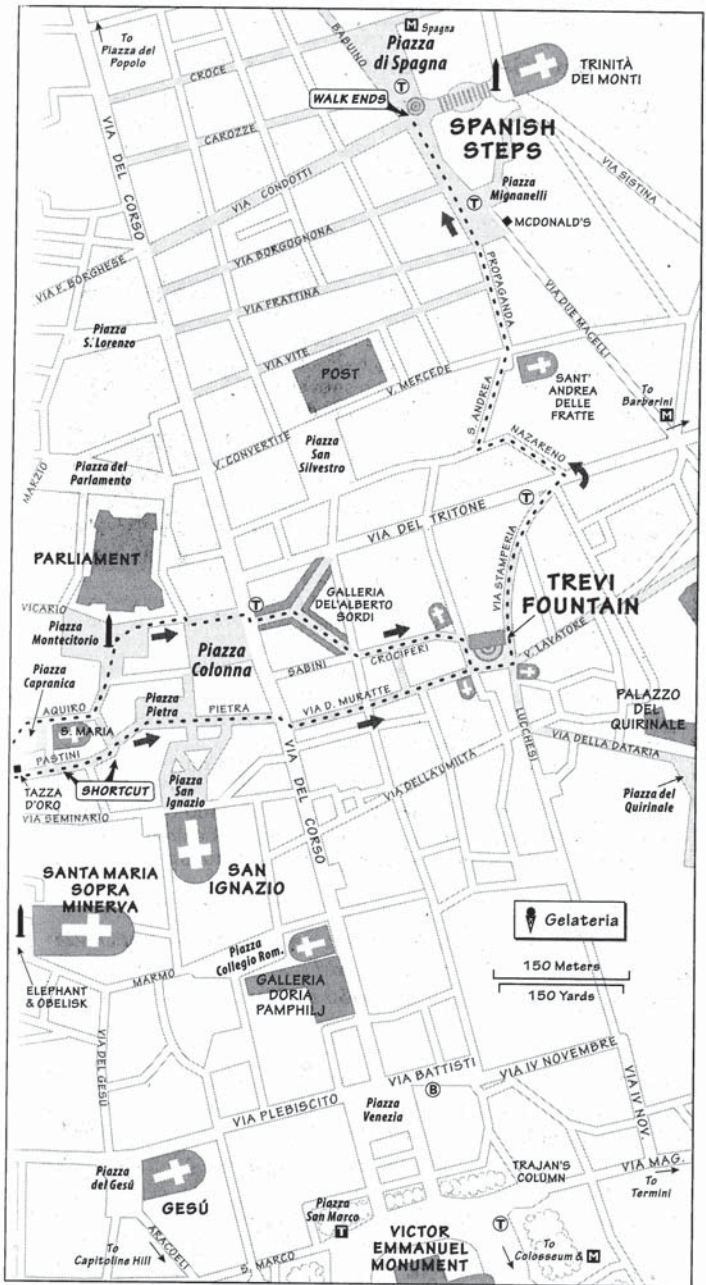
Rome wasn't above cheap imitations, however: A couple of the obelisks are ancient Roman copies. The one at the top of the Spanish Steps has spelling mistakes in the hieroglyphics.



Spanish Steps. Just use a map to get there, or follow these directions: Facing the Trevi Fountain, go forward, walking along the right side of the fountain on Via della Stamperia. Cross busy Via del Tritone. Continue 100 yards and veer right at Via Sant'Andrea delle Fratte, a street that changes its name to Via Propaganda before ending at the...

Spanish Steps

Piazza di Spagna, with the very popular Spanish Steps, is named for the Spanish Embassy to the Vatican, which has been here for 300 years. It's been the hangout of many Romantics over the years (Keats, Wagner, Openshaw, Goethe, and others). In the 1700s, British aristocrats on the Grand Tour of Europe came here to



Shopping Near Campo de Fiori

Two worthwhile parallel shopping streets run northwest (toward the river) from Piazza Farnese, just a block south of Campo de' Fiori: Via Monserrato/Via dei Banchi Vecchi and Via Giulia. (Streets in the opposite direction—to the southeast—are sleepier, with fewer shops.) While I've arranged these as a loop, you can pick and choose as you go.

Heading away from Piazza Farnese on low-key **Via Monserrato**, you'll see several antique, furniture, and home-decorating shops. But there are also some interesting clothing boutiques, as well as some unique shops. Hollywood (#107) is a cinephile's dream, with movie posters and rare DVDs; their sister store, at #110, sells movie-themed embroidered T-shirts. Between these two, at #108, is a fascinating old-time cobbler, with a crowded workbench crammed into a tiny shop. Estremi (#101) has some inspiring retro furniture, while Antichi Kimono (#43b-44) features Asian-themed dresses and fabrics.

Farther along, Via Monserrato becomes **Via dei Banchi Vecchi**, with even more antiques of varying aesthetics—from mothballed grannies to hipster vintage. Small and tasteful, Macoco (#138) sells colorful, artisanal toys for kids. Banchievecchi Pellami (#40) is an old-school leather shop, with belts and wallets. And Restore (#51) is packed with housewares, home furnishings, and kitchen gadgets.

When Via dei Banchi Vecchi dead-ends at the big cross street, loop left around the block to stroll more atmospheric **Via Giulia**—narrower, cobbled, and mostly traffic-free. Here you'll find fewer shops and more real-estate offices and architecture firms. House Kitchen & Design, near the start of the street at #101, is a cramped hole-in-the-wall with cooking gadgets; farther down, Magie di Casa (#140c) has a nice selection of linens, from tea towels to aprons.

One more street near Campo de' Fiori may be worth exploring: **Via Giubbonari**, which stretches southeast from the square. More heavily trafficked (and more touristy), it has dozens of stores selling affordable apparel aimed mainly at a younger crowd.

• *If Bruno did a hop, step, and jump forward, then turned right on Via dei Baullari and marched 200 yards, he'd cross the busy Corso Vittorio Emanuele; then, continuing another 150 yards on Via della Cuccagna, he'd find...*

Piazza Navona

This oblong square retains the shape of the original racetrack that was built around A.D. 80 by the emperor Domitian. Since ancient times, the square has been a center of Roman life. In the 1800s, the city would flood the square to cool off the neigh-



and replaced by classier boutiques, jewelers, and antique dealers. Nowadays the northern part of Via del Corso is closed to traffic, and for a few hours every evening it becomes a wonderful parade of Romans out for a stroll (see the "Dolce Vita Stroll" in the Nightlife in Rome chapter).

• *Cross Via del Corso to enter a big palatial building with columns, which houses the Galleria Alberto Sordi shopping mall (with convenient WCs). Inside, take the fork to the right and exit at the back. (If you're here after 22:00, when the mall is closed, circle around the right side of the Galleria on Via dei Sabini.) Once out the back, head up Via de Crociferi, to the roar of the water, lights, and people at the...*



Trevi Fountain

The Trevi Fountain shows how Rome took full advantage of the abundance of water brought into the city by its great aqueducts. This fountain celebrated the reopening of several of ancient Rome's aqueducts in the Renaissance and Baroque eras. After a thousand years of surviving on poor-quality well water, Romans could once again enjoy pure water brought from the distant hills east of the city.

This watery Baroque avalanche by Nicola Salvi was completed in 1762. Salvi used the palace behind the fountain as a theatrical backdrop for the figure of "Ocean," who represents water in every form. The statue surfs through his wet kingdom—with water gushing from 24 spouts and tumbling over 30 different kinds of plants—while Triton blows his conch shell.

The magic of the square is enhanced by the fact that no streets directly approach it. You can hear the excitement as you draw near, and then—bam!—you're there. The scene is always lively, with lucky Romeos clutching dates while unlucky ones clutch beers. Romantics toss a coin over their shoulder, thinking it will give them a wish and assure their return to Rome. That may sound silly, but every year I go through this tourist ritual...and it actually seems to work.

Take some time to people-watch (whisper a few breathy *bellos* or *bellas*) before leaving. There's a peaceful zone at water level on the far right.

• *From the Trevi Fountain, we're 10 minutes from our next stop, the*



the touristy, pedestrianized *Via delle Muratte* and heads straight for the fountain.

If you'd rather stick with me for the slightly longer version, instead bear left at the coffee shop and continue up *Via degli Orfani* to a big square.

Piazza Capranica is home to the big, plain Florentine Renaissance-style Palazzo Capranica (directly opposite as you enter the square). Big shots, like the Capranica family, built towers on their palaces—not for any military use, but just to show off.

• Leave the piazza to the right of the palace, heading down *Via in Aquiro*.

The street *Via in Aquiro* leads to a sixth-century B.C. **Egyptian obelisk** taken as a trophy by Augustus after his victory in Egypt over Mark Antony and Cleopatra. The obelisk was set up as a sundial. Follow the zodiac markings to the well-guarded front door. This is Italy's **parliament building**, where the lower house meets; you may see politicians, political demonstrations, and TV cameras.

• One block to your right is **Piazza Colonna**, where we're heading next—unless you like gelato...

A one-block detour to the left (past **Albergo Nazionale**) brings you to Rome's most famous *gelateria*. **Giolitti's** is cheap for takeout or elegant and splurge-worthy for a sit among classy locals (open daily until past midnight, *Via Uffici del Vicario* 40); get your gelato in a cone (*cono*) or cup (*coppetta*).

Piazza Colonna features a huge second-century column. Its reliefs depict the victories of Emperor Marcus Aurelius over the barbarians. When Marcus died in A.D. 180, the barbarians began to get the upper hand, beginning Rome's long three-century fall. The big, important-looking palace houses the headquarters for the prime minister's cabinet.

Noisy **Via del Corso** is Rome's main north-south boulevard. It's named for the Berber horse races—without riders—that took place here during *Carnevale*. This wild tradition continued until the late 1800s, when a series of fatal accidents (including, reportedly, one in front of *Queen Margherita*) led to its cancellation. Historically the street was filled with meat shops. When it became one of Rome's first gas-lit streets in 1854, these butcher shops were banned



borhood. (To see the ruins of the original entrance, exit the square at the far—or north—end, then take an immediate left, and look down to the left 25 feet below the current street level. Continue a bit farther if you want to pay €5 to tour the foundations up close.)

The **Four Rivers Fountain** in the center is the most famous fountain by the man who remade Rome in the Baroque style, Gian



Lorenzo Bernini. Four burly river gods (representing the four continents that were known in 1650) support an Egyptian obelisk. The water of the world gushes everywhere. The Nile has his head covered, since the headwaters were unknown then. The Ganges holds an oar. The Danube turns to admire the obelisk, which Bernini

had moved here from a stadium on the *Appian Way*. And Uruguay's *Río de la Plata* tumbles backward in shock, wondering how he ever made the top four. Bernini enlivens the fountain with horses plunging through the rocks and exotic flora and fauna from these newly discovered lands. Homesick Texans may want to find the armadillo. (It's the big, weird, armor-plated creature behind the *Plata* river statue.)

The *Plata* river god is gazing upward at the **Church of St. Agnes**, worked on by Bernini's former student-turned-rival, Francesco Borromini. Borromini's concave facade helps reveal the dome and epitomizes the curved symmetry of Baroque. Tour guides say that Bernini designed his river god to look horrified at Borromini's work. Or maybe he's shielding his eyes from St. Agnes' nakedness, as she was stripped before being martyred. But either explanation is unlikely, since the fountain was completed two years before Borromini even started work on the church.

Piazza Navona is Rome's most interesting night scene, with street music, artists, fire eaters, local *Casanovas*, ice cream, and outdoor cafés that are worthy of a splurge if you've got time to sit and enjoy Italy's human river.



Shopping Near Piazza Navona

The tangle of lanes just west of Piazza Navona can be fun to explore. But the main shopping street here—and one of the most charming streets in all of Rome, with cobblestones, leafy planters, and little to no traffic—is the straight-shot **Via dei Coronari**, between Piazza Navona and the bend in the river. To find it, pop out the north end of Piazza Navona and turn left. This is the place to browse antiques and daydream about furnishing a Roman apartment. *Stampe Antiche* “Trincia” Restauero (#15) is a fascinating shop that specializes in painstaking restoration of works of art, with antique prints that will fit in your suitcase. This street also boasts several fine clothing and shoe stores, such as *Superga* (#18), the classic Italian athletic shoe brand (which also makes designer heels). *Made* (#25) is a “creative bakery” with bagel sandwiches and delicate cupcakes.

After *Piazzetta di San Simeone*, there are fewer antiques and more clothes—stylish yet accessible. For example, tucked in the little square on the left, *Spazio IF* (#44a) features eye-catching Sicilian style—mostly women’s fashion, including handbags and scarves. *Dimorae Design* (#57) sells trendy Italian home furnishings. If you need a snack, *Gelateria del Teatro* (#65) is a good choice. At *Pastori Antichi* (#110), an army of military miniatures from around the world stands watch. *Lisa Corti Home Textile Emporium* (#197, part of a small Italian chain) fills its showroom with colorful fabrics, while *Le Tele di Carlotta* (#228) is a charming spot with hand-embroidered towels and handkerchiefs.

At the end of *Via dei Coronari*, you could angle right one block to *Castel Sant’Angelo* (described on page 65). Or, to make your walk a loop, hook left at the big square and *Alimentari Coronari* (gourmet sandwiches) onto **Via di Panico**. You’ll pass a few more shops along here—including *Kromatika Lab* (#14), with striking design.

From here, turn right on *Via degli Orisni*; one block later, turn left onto **Via del Governo Vecchio**, another top shopping street. Passing the Penny Lane shop (#4, with youthful vintage wear), you’ll be greeted by a street with fashion, home decor, textiles, and plenty of cute boutiques (casual wear and accessories—mostly women’s, but some men’s as well). The closer you get to Piazza Navona, the more crowded the street becomes, with souvenir stands and tourist-trap restaurants mixed in with boutiques. When the street opens up into a square, bear left up the narrow *Via di Pasquino* to reach Piazza Navona.

• *Leave Piazza Navona directly across from Tre Scalini (famous for its rich chocolate ice cream), and go east down Corsia Agonale, past rose peddlers and palm readers. Jog left around the guarded building (the Palazzo Madama, where Italy’s senate meets), and follow the brown sign to the Pantheon, which is straight down Via del Salvatore. After a block, you’ll pass (on your left) the Church of San Luigi dei Francesi, with its très*



French decor and precious Caravaggio paintings (church described in detail on page 128 in the Pantheon Tour chapter). If you’re planning on touring that church, do it now. Otherwise, head for...

The Pantheon

Sit for a while under the portico of the Pantheon (romantically floodlit and moonlit at night).

The 40-foot, single-piece granite columns of the Pantheon’s entrance show the scale the ancient Romans built on. The columns support a triangular Greek-style roof with an inscription that says “M. Agrippa” built it. In fact, it was built (*fecit*) by Emperor Hadrian (A.D. 120), who gave credit to the builder of an earlier structure. This impressive entranceway gives no clue that the greatest wonder of



the building is inside—a domed room that inspired later domes, including Michelangelo’s St. Peter’s and Brunelleschi’s *Duomo* (in Florence).

If it’s open, pop into the Pantheon for a look around. Also consider detouring to several interesting churches near the Pantheon before continuing on the walk (**Santa Maria sopra Minerva**, with its purely Gothic interior, and **San Ignazio**, with its 3-D Baroque illusions, are just a few steps away). For details on the Pantheon and these other churches, see the Pantheon Tour chapter.

• *With your back to the Pantheon, veer to the right, uphill toward the yellow sign that reads Casa del Caffè at the Tazza d’Oro coffee shop on Via Orfani.*

From the Pantheon to the Trevi Fountain

Tazza d’Oro Casa del Caffè, one of Rome’s top coffee shops, dates back to the days when this area was licensed to roast coffee beans.

Locals come here for a shot of espresso or, when it’s hot, a refreshing *granita di caffè con panna* (coffee slush with cream).

• *From here, our walk continues past some interesting landmarks to the Trevi Fountain. But if you’d like to get there a bit more directly, you can bear right past the coffee shop onto Via de’Pastini, which leads through Piazza di Pietra (with some surviving chunks of the Temple of Hadrian—described on page 61), then across busy Via del Corso, where it becomes*

