

Edited Guide Entry

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A Selection of Roman Restaurants

In Rome, Italy you may be looking for somewhere to eat, and the following four restaurants are moderate in price with the most expensive being at Asinocotto, because it is a challenge to ignore its impressive wine-list and order the *vino della casa* (house wine).

Ristorante Asinocotto

Up-and-coming young chef Giuliano Brenna has possibly Rome's most talked-about restaurant on his hands. The Trastevere district, where Asinocotto is situated, is one of the best parts of town to spend an evening (....).

Inside, the menu is a carefully executed blend of the traditional and the new wave. Fish dishes feature in all of the first three courses as does some exquisite vegetarian fare (the courgette flowers are stuffed with a delicate cheese sauce) but this is neither a fish nor a vegetarian restaurant. The *ravioli* is stuffed with pheasant, chicken-livers and black truffle, and for the main course the exquisite duck breast is served in a mandarin and green-tea sauce - very enjoyable.

The only criticism of the restaurant is that the waiting staff doesn't offer enough guidance as you try to navigate the fancy menu.

Brenna is also an expert with desserts, something of a rarity in Rome. The chocolate mousse is deliriously light, while the *semifreddo alla zabiaone* (a mousse-like custard served chilled) will send you into ecstasy. The *tortina al cioccolato* (chocolate mousse cake) is equally exciting.

Last but not least, the wine list is extensive, lands on your table with a reassuring thud, and makes no compromises in quality for the sake of quantity.

Asinocotto doesn't operate a sittings system, so if you do manage to book a table (and you should book in advance) then it is yours for the evening. If you only have a chance to visit one restaurant in Rome, then this has to be the one.

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Ristorante Asinocotto

Up-and-coming young chef Giuliano Brenna has possibly Rome's most talked-about restaurant on his hands. The Trastevere Asinocotto is situated, is one of the best parts of town to spend an evening and the two gay rainbow flags¹ outside make the restaurant a breeze.

Inside, the menu is a carefully executed blend of the traditional and the new wave. Fish dishes feature in all of the first three courses. Brenna does some exquisite vegetarian fare (the courgette flowers are stuffed with a delicate cheese sauce) but this is neither a traditional nor a vegetarian restaurant. The *ravioli* is stuffed with pheasant, chicken-livers and black truffle, and for the main course the veal breast is served in a mandarin and green-tea sauce - very enjoyable.

The only criticism of the restaurant is that the waiting staff doesn't offer enough guidance as you try to navigate the fancy menu.

Brenna is also an expert with desserts, something of a rarity in Rome. The chocolate mousse is deliriously light, while the *zabaglione* (a mousse-like custard served chilled) will send you into ecstasy. The *tortina al cioccolato* (chocolate mousse cake) is also exciting.

Last but not least, the wine list is extensive, lands on your table with a reassuring thud, and makes no compromises in quality for the sake of quantity.

Asinocotto doesn't operate a sittings system, so if you do manage to book a table (and you should book in advance) then it's a great evening. If you only have a chance to visit one restaurant in Rome, then this has to be the one.

Il Matriciano

This is the place to visit for classic Roman cuisine. It is slightly off the main tourist track and therefore primarily a haunt of Vatican officials in suits that look like they might be politicians.

The mixed vegetable *antipasti* does not disappoint, and the *prosciutto crudo* (cured ham) is excellent, too. As a follow-up you may like to find the classic Roman dish *bucatini alla matriciana* (thick tubed pasta with a tomato, bacon and chilli sauce) made as well as here. I have eaten the dish hundreds of times before. Next, the *osso buco* (braised veal in white wine) is again '*delizioso*', or '*squisito*' as the Italians say. The house wine comes in jugs and there is nothing wrong with that. Service is friendly and unhurried, and the prices offer incredible value.

For classic Roman cuisine, untainted by tourist fare, then this has to be one of the best.

Ristorante Abruzzi

Again, the Roman mixed vegetable antipasti platter is irresistible: slices of *frittata* and *bruscetta*, a courgette slice topped with bread, grilled, roasted onion, little croquette type things, stuffed mushrooms, pickled artichoke...

To follow on, the *tonarelli* (pasta which is thicker than spaghetti), served with peas, mushroom and tomato, is delicious.

The waiters are of the variety only normally found in Italy, of the older generation and having dedicated their careers to discretely serving patrons' choices while treading the careful line between friendliness and over-familiarity.

A wonderful touch at the end of the meal is that together with the bill arrives a couple of bottles of *digestivi* (*amaro* and *sambuca*) and you are encouraged to help yourselves. Now that's true old-world hospitality!

La Sagrestia

The *bresaola* (salted beef served in olive oil) with rocket and parmesan and/or the *prosciutto con melone* (cured ham and melon) gives an excellent start, washed down with a litre jug of the chilled house red.

The tortellini in brodo (stuffed pasta in a broth) is a miracle of simplicity, while the saltimbocca just melts in the mouth - the veal is fragrant and the prosciutto (cured ham) imparts just enough saltiness.

This place is a bit touristy in presentation - everywhere is when you get this close to Piazza Navonna - but the food is very good.

¹ A rainbow flag is a commonly used sign to denote that a pub or a restaurant is a gay pub/restaurant.

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