

FIVE OF THE FINEST PRIVATE VILLAS

A private Rome requires a private residence – room service without reception, a terrace without other guests. These properties are large enough for a family or a group of friends to share. All of them can arrange privileged experiences in Rome, from helicopter flights over the city to private tours of the ancient Mithraeum beneath the Circus Maximus.

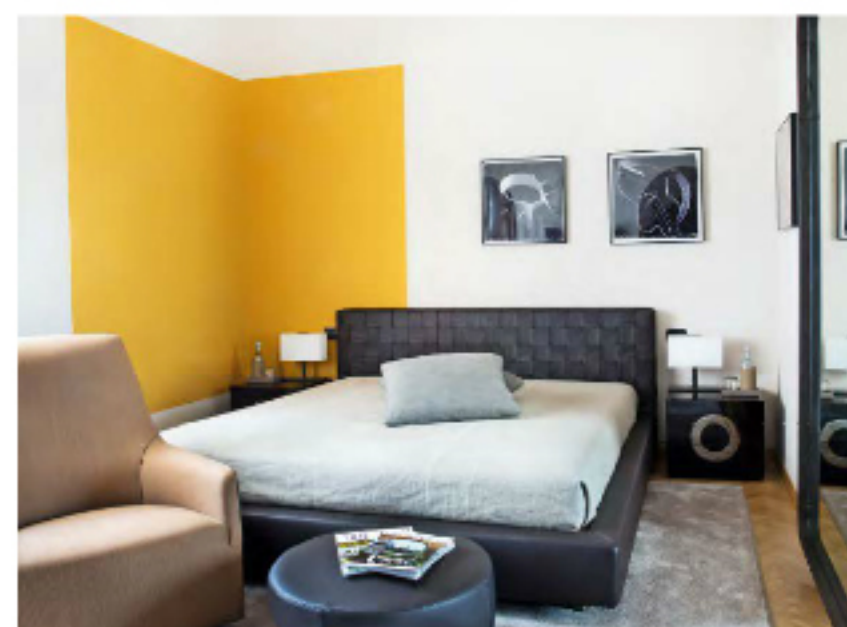
PORTRAIT ROMA

"Shoes maketh the man," my grandfather used to say. Or, in the case of Portrait Roma, some of the most luxurious private suites in Rome. Owned by the Ferragamo family, famous for making the best handmade shoes in Italy, this 14-room property has nothing so vulgar as a reception. Here, it is all about personal service, with an adviser to enhance your Roman experience, from private tours of the Vatican to personal shopping. Limed wood and dove greys enhance the Dolce Vita vibe, along with black-and-white prints of models and actors from an age when stars such as Elizabeth Taylor and Audrey Hepburn used to join the *posseggiate* on Via Veneto. Stylish and effortlessly cool, Portrait Roma's rooms have balconies overlooking the rooftops and one of the best roof terraces in the city for an aperitivo or a lavish breakfast.

Suites with kitchenettes from €459/€327 per night (0039 06 6538 0742; unjamcollection.com).

LA SCELTA DI GOETHE

On a visit to Rome in the late 18th century, Goethe discovered erotic love – though his habit of writing verses on his lover's naked back probably floated his boat more than hers. La Scelta di Goethe – or Goethe's Choice – consists of two sumptuous apartments on the Via del Corso, a few steps from the Spanish Steps. Through a private entrance you step into a world of aristocratic Roman taste – bookshelves of leather-bound volumes, Old Master paintings, deep leather armchairs, a personal butler to lay out an elaborate breakfast on your private roof terrace. And, for Goethe, the gilt-framed mirror at the end of the bed would have let him review his own work while making love.



Top: Portrait Roma's rooms offer balcony views (top). The gardens of Palazzo Parisi (above). Contemporary style at Villa Nocetta (below)

The Villa Medici suite, with a double bedroom, costs from €1,280/€910 a night. The Trinità dei Monti suite, which sleeps four, is from €1,760/€1,251. Two suites can be joined to accommodate six (0039 06 6994 2219; lasceltadigoethe.com).

VILLA LINA

Just under an hour from the city, this ancestral estate of olive groves, vineyards, and rambling gardens has five splendid houses to rent. The atmosphere is informal, artistic, quirky and charming – more bohemian farmhouse than smart villa. A small organic restaurant serves food from its gardens, but the best place for dinner is the 19th-century conservatory, with candlelight reflecting in a hundred panes of glass. Casa Vostro, which sleeps 10, is €550/€390 per night. Torre del Falco sleeps 10 and costs €500/€640, while the honeymoon pavilion next door is €300/€214 a night. There are two swimming pools, and a private chef can also be booked (0039 3888 274 775; refaisvillalino.com).

PALAZZO PARISI

In the hills of Sabina outside Rome, Palazzo Parisi is a sumptuous aristocratic villa dating back to at least the 11th century. Owned by Arabella Lennox-Boyd, the famed landscape gardener, this is a fantasy villa: it has a grand salotto in which frescoed birds fly across the vaults, a master bedroom with a gilt-framed canopied four-poster, labyrinthine kitchens overseen by the gracious Rita, a book-lined billiard room and a top-floor passageway whose crescent window looks into the nave of the church next door. Undoubtedly grand in scale, Villa Parisi is also informal, welcoming and fun. A tennis court, an infinity pool and walks in the Sabine Hills help the days spin by. Palazzo Parisi sleeps 10 adults and two children under 12 and costs from €5,000 per week (020 7931 9995; palazzoparis.com).

VILLA NOCETTA

In the hills behind St Peter's, in a neighbourhood of discreet walled villas, is one of the most civilised places to stay in Rome. In the gardens are a sun terrace and a heated pool beneath umbrella pines. Indoors are lavish spaces, from a hi-tech kitchen to a living room larger than most London flats. There is a fireplace, a grand piano, plus long elegant sofas and a collection of modern art. Downstairs, there are two options beyond the cinema-size television: a sedate game of billiards or a workout in the gym. Upstairs, spacious suites are beautifully appointed with luxury Italian bed linen. Villa Nocetta sleeps 12 in six suites and is available from €3,900/€2,777 per night (0039 06 663 7115; villanocetta.com).



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