



INSIDE:

The Ferrari Museum 4

Where to Stay in San Marino 5

Padova's Botanical Garden 6

New Affordable Rome Hotel 8

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The Ancient Republic of San Marino

It felt as if we had tip-toed into the gilt-edged pages of a storybook.

In the brisk November dusk with the moon rising, our small group ascended the steep *Salita alla Rocca* stone walkway that skirted the mountain ridge. Thousands of tiny lights shimmered in the valley far below. When we arrived at the illuminated massive stone *Guaita* fortress, we stared with mouths agape.

We pushed onward and upward to *Cesta*, the second tower, perched atop *Monte Titano*, a 2,400-foot-high limestone bluff that thrusts straight up from sea level. Beyond us, out in the falling darkness, stood *Montale*, the

third tower. It can be reached in good weather by hiking through the verdant *Parco Naturale*.

These massive fortifications are reputed to be among the oldest standing on the Italian peninsula. The fortresses, however, are not *in* Italy.



They are in an enclave — the 24-square-mile independent Republic of *San Marino* — surrounded by Italy. I came here on an all-too-short educational trip hosted by Donna Franca Tours but I had so much fun exploring the area that I'm sure I'll return. San Marino impresses me because it's the ultimate survivor.

continued on page 2



All photos by Julie Marie Semel

PADOVA: A Famous Chapel and More

Padova (known as *Padua*, in English) 22 miles from Venice, but a world apart from its high-energy neighbor, is famous for the Scrovegni Chapel (*Capella degli Scrovegni*) and across town, the *Basilica of St. Anthony*, the patron saint of travelers. Yet, Padova's hidden treasure and surprise gem is the *Orto Botanico*, a retreat from the kinesis of the busy streets and colonnaded passageways. This city of 212,000 claims to be the oldest in northern Italy, founded in 1183 B.C. by the Trojan prince Antenor.

Padova's Claim to Fame

The experience of just 15 minutes to see Giotto's 14th-century series of frescoes that cover the walls at the Scrovegni Chapel is alone worth the trip to Padova. *Enrico degli Scrovegni*, a wealthy banker, built the chapel over the remains of a Roman amphitheater. The attached unadorned-brick rectangular building was originally part of his palace. Two areas were for worship: one public, the other for the family. Scrovegni directed *Giotto* to depict stories from the testaments for visitors to meditate on the salvation of mankind.

Giotto painted his frescoed cycle of the *Virgin and Christ* and the *Last*

continued on page 6

San Marino has no natural level ground.

A History Lesson

Historically, the Italian peninsula was studded with hundreds of independent city states that fiercely defended their territories. Today, only two remain: Vatican City, surrounded by Rome, and San Marino, bordered by the Italian regions of *Emilia-Romagna* and *Le Marche* in central Italy.

Coupled with San Marino's impressive defenses was a policy of non-expansion. Because the Sammarinese didn't invade other city states, they weren't perceived as a threat. In addition, the Republic always forged valuable alliances. When Napoleon's army swept through the peninsula in the late 1700s, the French general respected San Marino's sovereignty because of his friendship with one of its regents, *Antonio Onofri*.

Giuseppe Garibaldi and his men sought refuge from Austrian troops in San Marino in 1849. Because of this and the sanctuary the republic gave to other supporters of unification, Garibaldi recognized San Marino's independence after the formation of Italy.

Even American president Abraham Lincoln said good things. "Despite being so small, your state is one of the most honored countries of the whole history," wrote Lincoln after being made an honorary citizen. The old town of San Marino and *Mount Titano* were recognized as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2008.

With no border formalities, passage from Italy to San Marino is seamless. Foreign visitors may enter without showing a passport. If you'd like your passport stamped as a souvenir, there's a 5€ charge. Italian is the official

language and the euro is the national currency. The cooking tastes much like that in the Italian province of Emilia-Romagna. Yet, for all the similarities, I never felt as if I were in Italy. To me, San Marino seemed like a distinctive little world that had waited 1,700 years for me to visit.

The Old Town

From our home base at the *Grand Hotel San Marino*, it was a short walk to the major points of interest in the Old Town. First stop was the *Piazza della Libertà*, the majestic open-air terrace with a seemingly infinite view of the valley. The waving blue and white state flag bears a crest of the republic's three towers. Their version of the Statue of Liberty also proudly wears the three towers carved onto her crown.

The neo-Gothic *Palazzo Pubblico* — where the Great and General Council (the Parliament) meets — anchors the piazza. From May through September, the splendidly uniformed *Guardia di Rocca* change ranks every hour on the half-hour.

The 31,000 citizens of the republic take

their sovereign status seriously. An average 90 percent of them vote. Every six months, the 60 elected members of the Great and General Council appoint two Captains Regent who govern jointly. The formal investiture ceremonies — including a city procession in period costume — take place every April 1 and October 1. This system has worked since 1243, presumably because no one remains in power long enough to be corrupted.

Any tour of San Marino should include a visit to the lovely *Basilica del Santo*, *Piazza Domus Plebis*, dedicated to the republic's founding father *Marinus*. His remains are in an urn on the high altar. Marinus, who was later canonized San Marino, was a Christian stone-cutter from the Dalmatian Coast who took refuge from the Roman Emperor Diocletian atop Monte Titano in the early 4th century. He and his small band of followers built a chapel from which grew the present republic.

The *Small Church of Saint Peter*, on the same piazza, also relates to Marinus. It contains two beds carved into the rock. According to tradition, the beds are those of Marinus and *Leo* (more about him later). The beds are said to have miraculous properties.

The *Church and Convent of Saint Francis* was built in 1361 by the master builders from *Como*. Today, only the exterior walls date from that period. The building houses a gallery displaying

Franciscan art such as panel paintings, canvases, frescoes and parchments.



Funicular



Palazzo Pubblico



Basilica del Santo

San Marino is the oldest const

Mementoes of San Marino

History, scenery and charm are all good but, when you return home, you can't give them as gifts. For this agenda, the shops in the Old Town offer an astounding array of fine goods. Because San Marino does not charge VAT (value added tax), the price of goods is lower than in Italy. It's not surprising then that many Italians buy high-ticket items such as electronic equipment in the republic. Perfumes, designer watches, ceramics, clothing, fashion accessories, crossbows, firearms and jewelry are all part of the mix.

For treasures that are uniquely Sammarinese, look to the commemorative stamps and coins issued by San Marino. The republic is a destination for international collectors. At the shop of the *State Philatelic and Numismatic Office* (Piazza Garibaldi, 5; 378-0549-882365), collectors are ensured of buying the authentic issues.

Three of my travel companions and I enjoyed a brief but satisfying shopping spree one evening before dinner at *ER Accessori* (Contrada dei Collegio, 45/47; 378-0549-990357). We scooped up some unique costume jewelry, lush silk wraps, woven scarves and warm friendly service.

Venturing Beyond the Old City

Despite the tight schedule, our escort *Stefano Marzocchi* wanted to acquaint us with some sites outside of San Marino's Old Town. He chose well and led us to a pair of destinations that

contrasted vividly with the republic and with each other.

We departed the commercial bustle of San Marino to drive about 10 miles through the Marecchia Valley to *San Leo*. From a distance, it looks like a toy medieval village plunked onto a high table of flat rock. This place has few of the trappings of modern tourism, just serene isolation.



When the Dalmatian stone cutters and friends Marinus and Leo (some historians believe they may have been brothers) parted ways around the year 300 A.D., each staked out their own mountaintop. The legacies of the neighboring towns

couldn't be more different. Many centuries ago, San Leo was of strategic importance in the wars of various city states. Famous people came calling: St. Francis visited in 1213 and *Dante* in 1306.



But on this drizzly Saturday morning, it was just our small group of Americans arriving in the nearly empty *Piazza Dante Alighieri*. We were greeted warmly by *Ugo Gorrieri*, an intellectually energetic retired French teacher, amateur historian and part-time guide.

We started at the Church of Pieve, which was first constructed in the 9th century on the spot of Leo's original chapel. The apse faces east with windows that let in light for morning matins. On the opposite wall, the only other openings in the church receive the sun's dying rays for vespers. As we sat quietly in the pews of this intensely

spiritual space, Ugo encouraged us to "listen to the silence of centuries."

Just a few yards away stands the massive ochre sandstone 12th-century Romanesque *Il Duomo San Leone*. Constructed literally on the side of the cliff, the entrance is on the side, rather than the front, of the building. Inside, we marveled at the barrel vaulting and bas-reliefs of animals and people. "This art was the Bible of the poor," Ugo explained. "It was all visual because of illiteracy." In the crypt under the Duomo is San Leo's tomb.

For our ultimate San Leo experience, we toured *La Rocca*, the fortress designed by the Sienese architect *Francesco di Giorgio Martini* in the late

continued on page 4

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stitutional republic in the world.



Maranello Rosso Museo



1500s. (Varying fortifications had stood on the spot since the 600s.) It's hard to discern where the gargantuan limestone rock formation ends and the handiwork of man begins. Visitors may walk all through the fort and the ramparts to savor the spectacular views. Exhibits include armor and weaponry of the Middle Ages.

Originally built to defend the town, La Rocca eventually became a high-security prison. Its most infamous inmate was *Cagliostro* (*Giuseppe Balsamo*), an 18th-century con artist who travelled in the highest circles. The cell where he died — which at that time was accessible only by a trap door in the ceiling — is now a shrine for his followers. The day we visited, half a

dozen flower bouquets had been placed in the cell.

If you want to experience San Leo in all its quietude, get there before July 2014. The American Harley & Indian motorcycle club will be holding their International Indian Rally in San Leo. Expect those ancient stones to reverberate.

The Ferrari Museum



For me, one of the thrills of travel is to have experiences out of my realm. Touring the *Maranello Rosso Museum* was one such adventure. I know virtually nothing about sports cars but my heart beat faster as we toured this museum. Even I could see that *Ferrari* is the sexiest automobile ever created.

The museum's name is a blending of *Maranello* — the Italian town west of *Bologna* where *Enzo Ferrari* built his factory — and *rosso*, the signature red paint that's as brilliant as the cars. Twenty-five vintage automobiles of the legendary maker are

on display in this cavernous space designed to evoke the adrenaline atmosphere of a day at the track. The ceiling is a *trompe l'oeil* blue sky and the floor is paved with asphalt. Our guide told us that each Ferrari car required about 1,600 man hours to craft. Among the displays is the legendary 1962 250 GTO that is considered Enzo Ferrari's masterpiece.

Planning a Visit to San Marino

It's not hyperbole to say we don't have enough space to list all the attractions in this tiny country. Numerous museums are devoted to special interests: fine art, natural history, wax works, Olympic sports, torture, and more. Concerts, sporting events, outlets, shopping malls, and festivals abound. Two highlights are the *Mille Miglia* parade of vintage sports cars in May and the *Feast of the Foundation of the Republic* on September 3, featuring flag throwers, concerts, fireworks and a crossbow competition in the *Cava dei Balestrieri* (Crossbowmen's Quarry).

Insiders advise that spring and summer are the optimal times to visit. The weather is moderate and you'll miss the summer crowds. A two- or three-day visit to the republic and San Leo can be an appealing adjunct to a longer vacation in Emilia-Romagna and the Marche, including interesting cities such as *Bologna*, *Ravenna* and *Urbino*. Venice is about one hour drive north of San Marino.

—Sharon Sanders



The Details

Quick Facts

For detailed information, visit www.visitsanmarino.com

To reach San Marino by car: Take the A14 Expressway Bologna – Ancona (exit Rimini Sud) and proceed along the Rimini-San Marino Highway (about 7 miles).

To reach San Marino by train: From the closest train station in Rimini, take a Bonelli or Fratelli Benedettini bus to San Marino.

To reach San Marino by air: The Rimini airport is about 15 miles from San Marino. Flights are most frequent in the summer. The Bologna Airport is 83 miles away but offers more U.S. connections.

Where to Stay

Grand Hotel San Marino

Viale Antonio Onofri, 31
San Marino
(378) 0549 992400
www.grandhotel.sm

Rates: A classic double room is 220€, a superior double 260€ and a deluxe double 320€, including breakfast. Discounts available for advance booking. Be sure to confirm a room with a view overlooking the valley.

Hotel Titano

Contrada del Collegio, 31
(378) 0549 991007
www.hoteltitano.com

Rates: For a superior double, including breakfast, rates vary with the season and start at 154€. Be sure to confirm a room with a view overlooking the valley.

1 € = \$1.35 at press time

Where to Eat

Ristorante Righi

Piazza Libertà, 10
(378) 0549 991196
www.ristoranterighi.com

Open from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. and 7 to 10:45 p.m. Closed Monday

The first floor *osteria* serves regional moderately-priced specialties. The pricier one-star Michelin restaurant upstairs serves local ingredients in innovative preparations. Reservations recommended.

Poggio Duca

Via Montemaggio, 45
Agenzia di San Leo
(39) 0541 924263
www.poggioduca.it

The restaurant at this *agriturismo*, halfway between San Marino and San Leo, offers a wonderful taste of *Romagnolo* (the Italian province of Romagna adjacent to San Marino) country cooking. Specialties, prepared with organic foods cultivated on the farm, include salumi, cheeses, *porchetta*, and *borlotti* beans simmered with tomato, onion and rosemary. *Sangiovese di Romagna* is the local red wine. A wall of windows and, in good weather, the spacious veranda overlook the picture-perfect Montefeltro Valley. Average cost for a five-course meal is under 30€.

What to See

The Towers

The first tower *Guaita*, *Via Salita alla Rocca*, and second tower *Cesta*, *Via Salita alla Cesta*, which houses the Museum of Ancient Weapons, are both open to the public. Hours vary slightly depending upon the season;

open 8:50 a.m. to 5 p.m. most of the year; 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. mid-June to mid-September. Combined admission is 4.50€. Ticket office closes 30 minutes earlier.

The Palazzo Pubblico

Piazza della Libertà

Hours are 8:50 a.m. to 5 p.m. mid-September to mid-March; 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. mid-March to mid-September. Admission is 3€.

St. Francis Museum

Via Basilicius
Hours are 8:50 a.m. to 5 p.m. mid-September to mid-March; 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. mid-March to mid-September. Admission is 3€.

For all state monument and museum information:
(378) 0549 882670
www.museidistato.sm

The Funicular (*Funivia*)

Ride the funicular for stunning vistas and a quick trip down to the market town of *Borgo Maggiore*, one of the eight other *Castelli* (old castle towns) that comprise the republic. Hours of operation vary with the season. May, June and September 6th through 30th from 7:50 a.m. until 8 p.m.; July 1 to September 5, 7:50 a.m. to 1 a.m.; March, April and October from 7:50 a.m. to 7 p.m.; winter months from 7:50 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Round trip ticket is 4.50€

San Leo

Tourism Office
Palazzo Mediceo
Piazza Dante Alighieri, 14
(39) 0541 926967
www.san-leo.it

La Rocca

The fortress is open every day from 9 a.m. to 7 pm. Tickets are 8€.

The Pieve and the Duomo

Open daily from 10 a.m. to 6 p.m.

American Harley & Indian Club International Rally

www.motociclette-americane.com

Maranello Rosso Musei

Strada dei Censiti, 21
Falciano
(378) 0549 970614
www.maranellorosso.com

Open February to November, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. and 2 p.m. to 6 p.m. weekdays; Saturday, Sunday and holidays only by reservation. Admission is 12€.

Tours

"Mythical, Legendary Ferrari Vacation"

Donna Franca Tours
www.donnafranca.com
(800) 225-6290
From \$2,899 per person, based on double occupancy, for 6 days/5 nights, land only.

Donna Franca Tours has long included San Marino as a stop on its escorted tours to Italy. This exclusive independent itinerary, through October 31, 2011, features guided visits to the Ferrari Museum at the factory in the Italian town of Maranello and the museum in San Marino. Special arrangements have been made to experience a Ferrari at its best, on an open road race track, during this once-in-a-lifetime 'Prova Ferrari'.

Exclusively for Dream of Italy subscribers, Donna Franca Tours can create a custom itinerary of the Republic of San Marino and other regional attractions. They can also book English-speaking private guides for San Marino and San Leo. Identify yourself as a DOI subscriber when you call the number listed above.

1600 is the oldest still in effect.

Judgment on the barrel-vaulted room's walls and completed the iconographic work in two years. With no architectural separations, Giotto framed the paintings with a frieze and small medallions, similar to those used in illuminated manuscripts. The barrel-vault with its starry sky, reminiscent of Ravenna's burial chapels, shows figures of *Our Lady and Child*, a *Blessing Christ*, and *Prophets and Saints*. Fourteen monochromatic allegorical paintings of *Vices* and *Virtues* are on the lower section of the walls. The 37 episodes from *Stories from the Gospel*, which include *Christ as a Child* and the *Passion*, do not follow the traditional sequence. Depictions from both testaments culminate in Christ's crucifixion and resurrection.

garden constantly adds plants that are known to be beneficial to man to the collection and the extensive seed exchange program is continuous.

Listed by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, the Orto Botanico created a garden for the blind with

Braille descriptions and plants that vary from year to year. The Mediterranean Palm, the garden's



All photos by Julie Maris/Semel



oldest, planted in 1585, is well known as a result of an appearance in Goethe's essays. Surrounding the garden's collection of exotic, rare, and endangered species is a circular wall built in the 1500s to prevent theft. Stone vases with wrought-iron plants dominate the tops of the four entrance gates.

Easily bypassed for the splashier and better-known attractions, the garden is a must-see, not only for its historical significance, but also for the peaceful contrast. A visitor can spend an hour within its walls and rarely see more than a few tourists and students studying plants or reading on the garden's benches.

More Noteworthy Sites

It's a short walk from the almost meditative garden to the Basilica of St. Anthony (*Basilica di Sant'Antonio da Padova*, simply known as *Il Santo* by locals) with eight Byzantine-influenced domes, a Romanesque campanile, and elaborate, marble interiors. Completed in the 14th century, the basilica is the repository for St. Anthony's body and relics and the destination of world pilgrimages. The original 13th-century church of Santa Maria Mater Domini was incorporated into the Basilica as the Chapel of the Black Madonna. Donatello's bronze statues highlight the extensive artwork, in addition to his equestrian monument to Gattamelata, adjacent to the Basilica.



Founded in 1222, the University of Padova is one of Italy's great learning institutions, counting Galileo and Copernicus among its most famous lecturers. The university's *Palazzo del Bo* is home to an anatomical amphitheater built in 1594. The only way to see the theater is through a guided tour — which will surely point out Galileo's lecture hall and podium.

Students singing "*Dottore, Dottore*" through Padova's arcaded and medieval streets continue the tradition and celebrate the completion of academic degrees. Shakespeare also sings praises of Padova in the *Taming of the Shrew*: "I come to wive it wealthily in Padova; If wealthily, then happily in Padova." For those lucky to see the wealth of treasures in Padova, then happily they'll return.

—Julie Maris/Semel

A Little-Known Gem

The *Orto Botanico di Padova* established in 1545 as a medicinal garden, is the world's oldest university botanical garden. For almost 500 years, it has been a center for scholars of pharmacology and ecology, botanic studies and scientific research. The

Padova's Prato della Valle is

The Details

Scrovegni Chapel

Piazza Eremitani
Giardini dell'Arena
(39) 049 2010020
www.cappelladeglisrovegni.it
Open daily from 9:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m., with extended hours until 10:00 p.m. on some nights.

Reservations to visit the *Scrovegni Chapel* are essential as only 25 people are allowed into the chapel every 15 minutes. Online reservations for the chapel must be made at least 24 hours in advance and visitors pick up their tickets at the Eremitani Museum, adjacent to the chapel, one hour before their entry time. Tickets can be purchased using the two- or three-day Padova Card (see additional info below) that gives tourists reduced rates or free access to museums, historic sites, public transportation and parking.

Admission to the Scrovegni Chapel without the Padova Card is 13€ for adults and 6€ for students. In addition to admission fees, guided tours are 2€.



wikipedia.org

Padova Card

(39) 049 8767911
www.turismopadova.it

Padova Cards cost 16€ for 48 hours or 21€ for 72 hours. Each card is valid for one adult and a child under fourteen years of age. Padova Cards include admission to the Scrovegni Chapel and can also be purchased through the chapel's Web site. Each Padova Card entitles its holder to one visit to the chapel; an additional 1€ reservation fee is added to each admission booked with the card. Padova Cards purchased online can be picked up at various tourist offices, as well as at the Eremitani Museum.

Palazzo del Bo

University of Padova
Via VIII Febbraio, 2
(39) 049 827 5111
<http://bit.ly/feU8JA>

Guided tours of the *palazzo* are available Monday through Saturday. Purchase tickets at the atrium ticket office 15 minutes ahead of time. Admission is 5€ for adults and 2€ for students.

Orto Botanico dell'Università di Padova

Via Orto Botanico, 15
www.ortobotanico.unipd.it
Open daily April to October from 9.00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m. Closed for lunch from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m.
Open November to March from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m.

Audio and multimedia guides in Italian and English are available. Admission is 4€ for adults and 1€ for students.

Basilica of St. Anthony

Via Orto Botanico, 11
www.basilicadelsanto.org
Open winter 6:20 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.; summer 6:20 a.m. to 7:45 p.m. On Saturday and Sunday the basilica closes at 7:45 p.m. after the last mass.

Bar Corte Sconta

Via Dell'Arco, 8
(39) 049 8756962
Open daily, 10:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.

For a break from sightseeing, have a spritz, the traditional aperitif made with *Aperol* and *Prosecco* at this wine bar. Hungry students leave messages of love on the bulletin board and the menu is written on mirrors. The bar serves bacala crostini, appetizers, *panini*, and *Recioto de Soave*, the first *Veneto* wine to have the DOCG appellation. Located in the former Jewish Ghetto dating from the 11th century, near the *Piazza delle Erbe*, the area is filled with small shops.

Ristorante Belle Parti

Via Belle Parti, 11
(39) 049 8751822
www.ristorantebelleparti.it
Open for lunch, 12:30 to 2:30 p.m. and for dinner, 7:30 to 11 p.m.
Closed Sunday

Find this hidden gem for a Slow Food lunch or dinner where the proprietor *Stefania Martinato* treats her guests as family. The warmth of the attentive staff extends to the interiors filled with elegant flowers and art. This excellent restaurant specializes in seafood and classic regional dishes.

Le Calandre

Via Liguria, 1
Sarmeola di Rubano
(39) 049 630303
www.calandre.com
Open for lunch, noon to 2 p.m. and for dinner, 8 to 10 p.m.
Closed Sunday and Monday

To celebrate life, gastronomy, and your Italian adventures, a short drive from Padova will take you to *Le Calandre* and *Massimiliano Alajmo*, who at the age of 28 became the youngest three-star Michelin chef. Creativity, technique, and artistry combine with his approach for purity and lightness. Working with a perfumer, Massimiliano developed natural and essential oils extracted from fresh ingredients that stimulate our sense of smell and memories. The *Essenze* sprays that include cardamom, mandarin and lemon are used to finish seasonal and traditional dishes. The restaurant has two extensive Italian and French wine cellars. *Il Calandrino*, the informal bar/restaurant/bakery, serves breakfast, lunch and dinner.

1 € = \$1.35 at press time

A New Affordable Rome Hotel

After a few years of staying fairly stable, rates for Rome hotel rooms are on the rise again. While the key to getting the best rate is often to book very early, not all of us can or do plan so far in advance. I found myself in this last-minute situation while visiting Rome early last summer. I had reservations for just two nights of my four-night stay. While I usually have a plan of hotels to review, this time I was winging it. I asked my intern back home to do a quick search to see if she could find a new-ish and affordable place to stay in Rome.



Junior Suite

The result was my stay at *Hip Suites*, a four-room property that had just opened the previous month in the heart of Rome's Trastevere neighborhood. The high-end boutique look of the room photos together with the price — 108€ per night, had me entering my credit card in minutes. I was also impressed that every room came with its own laptop computer and wireless Internet.

Owner *Tomaso Lanteri* e-mailed me to arrange a time to meet me at Hip Suites, which is in a converted apartment in a residential building. With such a small place, it is impossible to expect the proprietor to be there at all times, though he makes sure guests know how to reach him at all hours. Tomaso offers excellent concierge service. For me, he recommended a favorite local restaurant and arranged an early morning transfer to take me to the airport.

The small common area looks like a mini-version of a reception area at much larger, expensive boutique hotel. The entire property is decorated

primarily in white with touches of black and chrome, giving it a modern feel.

Tomaso showed me to room #2. I immediately wanted to give an award to whoever designed the room as it was the



Room #2



Bathroom in Room #2

most efficient use of space I have ever seen. The bed was round, in part because it was a funky modern design but also because that was all that would fit in the room. While I fit perfectly in the small bathroom and shower, I wondered how a broad-shouldered, tall man might fare.

I was impressed with the small touches such as the small, twinkling ceiling lights that could be turned on or off. They added a whimsical feel to the room, which was all white with a burgundy-colored duvet on the bed. The room sported all of the amenities one would need — mini-bar, flat-screen TV, phone, a small safe, a hair dryer, the coveted laptop.

The only problem with the room wasn't the room itself, but the noise coming from outside when I was trying to sleep. It was surprisingly cool so I had the window open. I closed the shutters, but the slats still let in the revelry of the party goes below.



Perhaps if I had put on the air conditioning, it would have helped. The excellent location is a double-edged sword in this case, but at least two of the other rooms are on the other side of the building and may not be noisy.

Tomaso gave me breakfast coupons to use at the café, a stone's throw from Hip Suites, and I enjoyed having my



Room #3

coffee, pastry and juice among the locals rather than in a stuffy breakfast room.

Since my stay, room rates at Hip Suites have gone up, at least some of the time. If I stayed in the same room during the same week, this year, I would have to pay 158€ instead of 108€. The other three rooms include a double room with two single beds, a triple room and a junior suite.

The Details

Hip Suites

Via della Lungaretta, 88
(39) 06 58333959
www.hipsuites.com

Rates: Double rooms range from 108 to 208€ per night, including breakfast, depending on exact dates.

The junior suite ranges from 108 to 238€ per night.

Rome is home to 2.8 million people.