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Greetings again from winter-free Rome! In fact, the biggest news since our first on-line newsletter is the virtually total absence of cold weather this year throughout Italy. It has been t-shirt weather in Rome many days in December and January. Alarming, of course, for its literally earth-shattering implications, but wonderful short-term.

With the passing of the years, Vacanza Bella is concentrating more and more on fewer and fewer properties. In a handful of cases, we're losing places we've offered for years because owners have gotten older, hence tired of renting. In a few cases, the owners have themselves moved in! We get offered at least a dozen new properties per week, but before we consider even going to see them, they have to be perfect on paper; if not, we don't.

*More important, we're focusing on just those magical places which we've offered for years and have come to love. **Villa Oliva** is one of these, as you'll read below.*

And as you well know, we've beat our heads against the wall since the beginning in an effort to steer you away from the beaten path. We're incorrigible about it. It used to be that Rome, for example, our favorite city on earth, could handle the crowds. Now, it can't. But you can still get away from it all, and below you'll find a few ways we've found to do it.

Daniel

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VILLA OLIVA *Convenient, Yet Away from It All*



We're in love with [Villa Oliva](#). The location: An easy hour or so north from the Rome airport, meaning you can land and be home and settled with a minimum of stress. We're talking the southernmost tip of Umbria, literally 15 minutes or less from both southern Tuscany and northern Lazio. Many villas in this area are weekend retreats for busy Romans; indeed, the convenience of the train has made it quite thinkable for commuting. And yet, you're immersed in one of Italy's most beautiful, uncrowded, untouristed countrysides.

We've never figured out the untouristedness of this area, as there are tons of things to see and do. We've concluded that it's actually *because* of its proximity to Rome: it's too close to take seriously; the attraction of Rome causes this area to get overlooked.

Villa Oliva Essentials

Four bedrooms – two masters with queen beds, two with joinable twins – plus three full baths, and a guest half-bath off the living room. It's a great house for 2 couples, a group of adults traveling together, or two families. Amenities: Swimming pool, window screens, brand-new beds, and one of the two or three best views of any property we offer. Perhaps the best “amenity” of all is Argentina, the resident housekeeper/cook (yes, that's her name). She and her husband live unobtrusively on the property, and guests have employed Argentina's fabulous cooking services repeatedly.

Close By

What's close by? Well, the coast for one thing: Santa Marinella and Santa Severa, a pair of neat, totally

Italian beach resorts are under an hour's drive.

Hilltowns? The nearest villages – virtually untouched by American or any other tourism – are Otricoli, Magliano Sabina, Orte, and Narni. The convenience of this location is that you are near the junction of two 4-lane highways, one leading rapidly to more famous destinations like Todi, Perugia, Spoleto, and Assisi, the other leading to Florence and Rome. From the Orte train station, Rome is less than 40 minutes' ride, Florence about 90.

Plus:

- Three of Italy's most famous gardens: [Villa Lante](#), Villa Farnese; and [Bomarzo](#).
- Three charming lakes, Bolsena, Vico, and Bracciano.
- Italy's most famous waterfall, the [Cascate delle Marmore](#).
- Towns especially noted for antiques and hand-made ceramics, Deruta and Amelia in particular.
- Some of the loveliest, least touristed villages, towns, and small cities in Italy: Viterbo, Tuscania, Amelia, Spello, Montecchio, Fara in Sabina, Civita di Bagnoregio, etc., etc. Not to mention really famous places like Orvieto, Assisi, Todi, Spoleto, and Rome itself.

Sample Itinerary

Take a look on our website at the [sample itinerary](#) for this property to see exactly how you can spend two weeks here with more to do than can possibly be fit into the time at hand.

Surviving the Crowds in Rome

We can't stand being part of a herd, no matter what the attraction. Endless lines just aren't our thing. So yes, we'll dare to say it: When in Rome, don't do the Vatican, which must be one of the most unpleasant places on earth (including its gardens, unless visiting spectacular examples of kitschy bad taste is one of your goals in life).

Timing is Everything

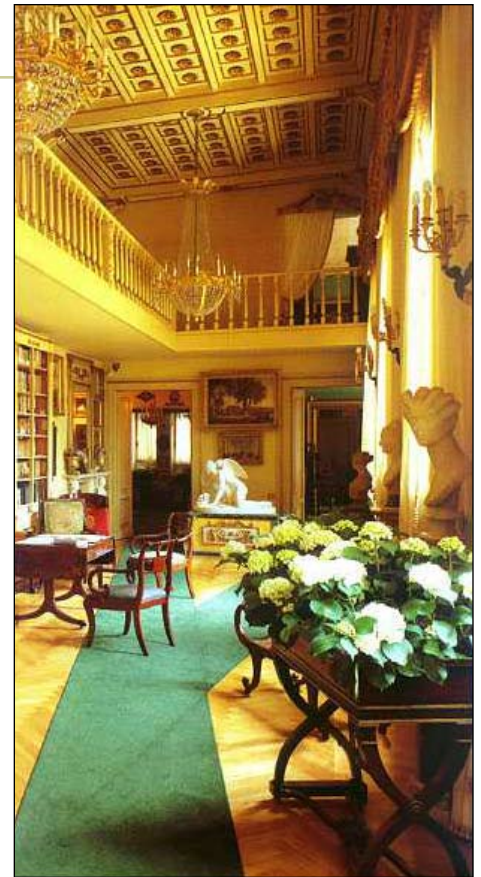
The Galleria Borghese? Is it worth it? For us it's the Caravagios, the Berninis, and otherwise acres of unmemorable wallpaper. If you must go, there's a very easy way to avoid the crowds. For one thing, you need to reserve, and you get a timed ticket. Our suggestions: Avoid the 11am ticket at all costs. And at whatever time you do reserve, go in about 20-30 minutes afterwards, i.e., if your ticket is for 9am, go in at 9:30. That way, you'll have the place virtually to yourselves, as the hordes will have, as they say, "moved on". No matter

what they say, you can stay as long as you want.

Museums

Other museums? You decide. If you're into ancient art, Rome's newly reopened [Museo Barracco](#) is an absolute jewel. So, on a larger scale, is the Palazzo Massimo practically next door to the Termini train station, with major masterpieces in a spectacularly beautiful arrangement. Finally, we strongly recommend the [Centrale Montemartini](#) out on Via Ostiense: an interesting, real Roman neighborhood. It's a masterpiece of industrial architecture right in the city, where ancient sculptures are interspersed among the turbines. You can combine this with a visit to the nearby Protestant Cemetery, one of the most beautiful places on earth. All of these attractions are virtually crowd-free at any time.

We love small house-museums, and Rome has several very interesting ones: You need a good guidebook to find them, but do



The Mario Praz Museum

the research and you'll be well-rewarded: The [Mario Praz Museum](#), the [DeChirico House-Museum](#), the Keats-Shelley Museum, the [Casina delle Civette](#). All are absolutely delightful. And empty.

Finally, what about just strolling? Our advice, stay away from anyplace you've heard of. The Colle Oppio, the Celio, the Aventine, Testaccio: all are central, all are untouristed, all are extremely interesting and beautiful.

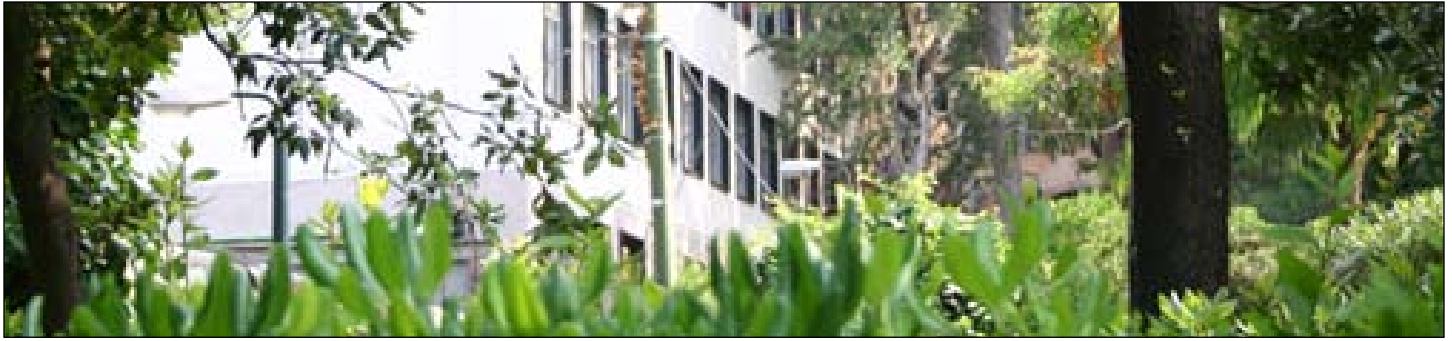
Rome's Greatest Hits

And so, what about places you **have** heard of? Trevi Fountain, Pantheon, Spanish Steps, Colosseum, Forum, Piazza Navona, Campo dei Fiori? Our advice is to do them early in the morning, as early as you possibly can, while they are still (somewhat) magical. By 11am, it's like the mall.



Rome's Protestant Cemetery: One of the most beautiful places on earth

A Magical Daytrip from Cinque Terre



If you happen to be booked in one of our Cinque Terre places and need to assuage your guilt at dedicating too much time to culture-free R + R, then consider the [Wolfsoniana](#) as a daytrip.

The *what?*

The Wolfsoniana is a villa/garden combo, alongside Genoa's Galleria d'Arte Moderna, in the charming seaside resort of Nervi, just south of Genoa itself. It's the brainchild of Mitchell Wolfson, col-

lector of all sorts of decorative objects, furniture, paintings, sculptures, and posters from the period 1880-1945 in Italy. It's a gorgeous and interesting place, and you can get a combined ticket as well with the adjacent Modern Art Gallery.

The Wolfsoniana complex is easily reachable by train from the Cinque Terre. You can walk to the site from Nervi's train station. It's open Tuesday to Sunday 10-7; closed Mondays.

*From the collection of
the Wolfsoniana in Nervi*

See you in 3 months or so. In the meantime, do browse our website, www.vbella.com, for Italian travel ideas.

Daniel