



#### MORE TO THE STORY

"We still call Australia Rome," says George, with a wink. He's a West Australian whose grandparents migrated from Italy in the late 1940s. He's travelling with his father, Paolo, and we all laugh together while humming these inventive new lyrics to the Peter Allen classic, now known to new generations as "that Qantas song".

It's not long after take-off from Perth aboard the inaugural flight connecting from Sydney to Perth then to Rome and the mood is festive. Chef Neil Perry has included celebratory dishes on the menu, there are Italian-speaking cabin crew and Captain Alex Passerini makes bilingual announcements, including pointing out a surprise early-morning view of the Pyramids of Giza to our left. Paolo hasn't been back to "the old country" since he was a young child and as we begin our descent to Fiumicino, I imagine he's excited but a little apprehensive. "I'm Australian," he tells me, "but it's time to reconnect."

It's time, too, for Qantas to add Rome to its network after a gap of 19 years since folding its flights via Bangkok in 2003, having first included Rome on its so-called Kangaroo Route between London and Australia in 1948. The new service is seasonal, offering three return flights a week though to October 6, with a similar northern summer schedule from June 2023. With no international stopovers, it shaves about three hours from any equivalent flight to the Italian capital, taking 16 hours between Perth and Rome.



Qantas captain Alex Passerini and first officer Natasha Perry on the Rome flight

The Boeing 787 Dreamliner is a quiet aircraft with twin aisles. A relatively low maximum load of 236 passengers makes boarding and disembarking faster and more streamlined than, say, an A380, with more than double the capacity. There's no first class; the business cabin of 11 rows is configured as a 1-2-1 layout with David Caon-designed "suites" and is divided by bulkheads and galleys into two sections. Premium economy is behind with just five rows of 2-3-2 seats and economy seats are arranged 3-3-3 beyond. The "secret squirrel" pairs of seats, 59AB and KJ in the final row, are

close to the services and toilets but preferable to the squash of the three-seat norm.

Qantas is also offering a circle fare for passengers to fly into Rome and return from London on the one ticket. But given recent Heathrow horrors and delays, I'd be inclined to take a train from Rome and head deeper into Italy and do the destination in more depth. Exclusively Italy can arrange rail tickets, city and regional touring, villa stays and transport. Andiamo, George and Paolo.

[qantas.com](http://qantas.com)  
[exclusivelyitaly.com](http://exclusivelyitaly.com)

Hotel Vilon interior, far left; Villa Spalletti Trivelli, main; Hotel De' Ricci Roma entry foyer, below left, and Charade Bar, below centre; Villa Spalletti Trivelli guestroom, below, and salon, inset; courtyard dining at Hotel Vilon, bottom



and there's a small in-house menu for lunches or dinners, which can be also be taken in the garden.

While technology and modern conveniences are a given, the Spalletti Trivelli family has no agenda to change the quintessential style and sense of privilege.

But the 12 guestrooms and suites, named for Rome's historic districts (mine is No.7; Regola), have been jazzed up with flat-screen TVs, finest bedlinens, airconditioning, complimentary mini-bar and sparkling white marble bathrooms (big tubs are a given). The bottle of Rondirose atop the mini-bar is from the family-owned Pomario estate in Umbria.

A tiny elevator trundles up to the accommodation levels but climbing the grand, curving staircases is more revelatory, eventually to the open rooftop, where a hot tub bubbles away amid potted plants and sun-loungers. Inspired by Roman baths, there's even a wellness centre for steams and saunas.



#### IN THE KNOW

Small Luxury Hotels of the World has 12 members in Rome plus a varied portfolio across Italy. Look for online deals that include seasonal rates, breakfast and minibar, transfers and touring extras. Weeknights are generally cheaper during the northern summer.

[slh.com](http://slh.com)

offers gazebo seating, pebbled paths and white roses in summer. Walk past the presidential palace and down (and down) to Trevi Fountain. In this historic heartland, storied monuments appear unsummoned around corners or framed at the end of narrow lane-ways like travel posters.

**Perfect for:** Devotees of grand homes who long to sample the aristocratic life amid authentically faded (not frayed) surroundings.

**The verdict:** If I were a gold-digger, Villa Spalletti Trivelli would be my prince. Courtly, dependable and beautifully mannered. Next time I'll wear a tiara.

#### HOTEL DE'RICCI ROMA

A wine hotel? But, hey, I don't drink. Urbane general manager Flavio Scannavino is also a trained sommelier but if he's shocked by my abstinence, he hides it well. The lure of this eight-suite retreat for connoisseurs of vintage drops is immediately apparent. It feels like a designer's take on a speakeasy on the ground floor, with a cigar lounge of Chesterfields and wingbacks; glass-fronted armoires filled with fine glassware and champagne buckets in the foyer; and wine crates used as whimsical touches across the retro-chic decor. But the cellar is no designer folly; there are more than 1500 bottles of exclusive and rare vintages stashed away and private tastings are offered.

All eight chambers, each loosely themed around a wine region and a few with big terraces, feature Italian furniture from the '60s and '70s, timber floors, a private wine selection (contents discussed with Scannavino before arrival) and customised illustrated wallpaper. It sounds twee but has been accomplished with an assured touch and feels spacious and super-comfortable, including bathrooms tiled in sexy black and in-room breakfasts served with panache. The hotel is owned by Lorenzo Lisi of seafood restaurant Ristorante Pierluigi, also famed for its wine list.

**Love:** It's a passion project and one to admire for its focus and an execution that's original and funky.

**Tips:** Drift into the Charade Bar by the foyer for a drink, share platter of cheese and charcuterie or beautifully simple pasta. The space is intimate, imaginatively lit and imbued with a real sense of secrecy and humour. Sip the Sophia Loren cocktail mixed with Stoli raspberry vodka, lychee juice, vanilla sugar and fresh lavender. Explore the surrounding Regola Rione beat, home to antiques dealers and galleries. Campo de' Fiori outdoor market is close by.

**Perfect for:** Not just wine buffs but anyone who enjoys small hotels and hands-on service.

**The verdict:** I'd have to take up drinking again to really get serious with this signor but the relationship provides an enjoyable and unexpected fling. Smart, clever, charming and casual-chic. A memorable date.

Susan Kurosawa was a guest of Qantas and SLH.