

September 1, 2015

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Gold Key to Rome: Omnia Pass Opens City's Doors

Posted: 08/06/2015 3:44 pm EDT | Updated: 08/06/2015 3:59 pm EDT

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THE OMNIA ROME PASS, YOUR KEYS TO THE KINGDOM

For first-timers in Rome, the eternal city today can seem as helter-skelter as it must have been when Roman centurions strolled the Forum and street vendors hawked everything from slaves to vegetables. Rush to the Vatican and get in line to tour St. Peter's Cathedral and you'll find yourself hip deep behind travelers from every continent: school kids on tour, nuns in habits, amateur historians, retirees and Gen X-ers weaned on gladiator movies.



But you don't have to be waiting for hours to reach the entrance. Treat yourself to

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the Omnia & Roma Pass - sold together as a package -- and you'll be through the gate and into the Coliseum, the Vatican Museum, and the rest of Rome, both new and old. When I was there, earlier this year, the streets were so crowded and the sidewalk cafes so full that I wasted most of my first day waiting to buy tickets.



Then a good Samaritan showed me his Omnia & Roma Pass, (ORP), the two passes sold together, good for three days and priced at € 98. Before you could say "great Caesar" I'd gone to the Omnia office next to St. Peter's Cathedral and bought the package. It was just two cards, a guidebook and a map but it proved to be the keys to the kingdom.



I made an appointment to see the Vatican Museums and the Sistine Chapel that same morning. And from there on I whizzed through or past ticket offices, around long lines and through dedicated turnstiles.

The ORP was pricey but it cost less than buying the same tickets separately. I didn't have to carry wads of cash - just enough for lunch - or take my wallet out to make change. And the two passes complement each other.

The Roma Pass is the transportation card, good on city buses and the subway. You swipe it on the electronic reader in the bus or in the subway station and you're good to go. You can get on and off on a whim, take as many rides as you want, go anywhere

within the city and not incur an extra fare. As a bonus, the Rome Pass also includes free entry to two most of Rome's most significant monuments, museums and palaces.

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But the Roma Pass won't get you into Rome's "Big Three," the Vatican Museum, Sistine Chapel and St. Peter's Basilica. That's the job of the Omnia Pass, which does and even more important, let's you choose a specific time. The ORP office near St. Peter's issues the tickets and makes appointments, an arrangement that saves hours wasted standing in line, and makes it easier to plan your time.

The Omnia Pass also includes entries to the much older and equally historic Basilica of St. John in the Lateran, and to St. Peter's Prison. It also includes free or discounted entries to most of Rome's other major attractions: monuments, museums, Renaissance palaces, archaeological sites and current exhibitions. Additional benefits include a detailed street and tour map and as many hop-on hop-off tours on Omnia's Roma Cristiana double-decker sightseeing buses as you want.



The pocket-sized guidebook and maps are also a bonus. Besides explaining how to use both passes to best advantage, it lists every possible attraction, including the street address, opening hours, phone number, nearby bus and subway stops and the website. The guide is keyed to the map, a quality production that shows streets, neighborhoods, a subway map, numbered attractions (keyed to the list), and route maps of four, neighborhood-themed, self-guided walking tours.

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If there's a downside to fast-tracking Rome it's that you might forget to pause and take it all in. So I did what Romans do so well: I quit early, sat at a sidewalk café, ordered a plate of pasta and a glass of wine, and watched the world go by.

To buy the Omnia & Roma Pass on the Internet go to www.omniavaticanrome.org. Or buy it in Rome at the ORP St. Peter's Office, Piazza Pio XII, 9, Rome. Buy the Roma Pass separately at www.romapass.it. For more about Rome, go to www.turismoroma.it.

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