

Architectural Itineraries in Rome: From Papal Ceremony to Urban Vision

Walking Tour Itineraries

Thursday, October 15 at 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

Friday, October 16 at 9:00 am - 12:00 pm

School of Architecture
Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

Rome endures as an unrivaled palimpsest of architectural and urban ingenuity, its layers most vividly revealed during the Renaissance and Baroque eras. These two meticulously curated walking itineraries—each unfolding across two consecutive mornings—invite participants to immerse themselves intellectually and experientially in the cultural, spiritual, and political currents that forged the Eternal City at moments of profound metamorphosis.

Designed for distinguished alumni architects, the program seeks to rekindle a deep engagement with the historical roots of the discipline through firsthand observation and thoughtful interpretation of the spaces, structures, and urban systems that have come to define the Western architectural canon. As participants traverse the city on foot, they will piece together and interpret the narratives etched into its stone and streets—reflecting on how form, symbolism, and power coalesce in architecture across the ages.

Itinerary 1 – The Papal Route: From St. Peter’s to St. John Lateran

Theme: Ritual, Procession, and the Sacred Axis

This itinerary traces the historical *Via Papalis*, the route followed by newly elected popes on their procession from St. Peter’s Basilica to the Cathedral of Rome, St. John Lateran. Along this ceremonial path, architecture was used not only to define urban space but also to communicate the spiritual and temporal authority of the papacy.

Participants will examine key examples of Renaissance and Baroque religious and civic architecture, engaging in on-site analyses of spatial organization, materiality, urban relationships, and symbolic alignments. The route also invites a critique of more recent interventions—such as *Via della Conciliazione* and *Via dei Fori Imperiali*—which imposed modern ideologies onto Rome’s historic layers, generating tensions between preservation, representation, and spectacle.

The educational goal is to foster a critical awareness of how Rome’s architectural evolution reflects changing visions of sacred space, ritual movement, and the city as a stage of power.

Summary of Visits: Itinerary 1 – The Papal Route (2 Mornings)

Day 1 – From St. Peter’s to Campo de’ Fiori

- St. Peter’s Square and Basilica
- Via della Conciliazione
- Church of San Giovanni dei Fiorentini
- Via Giulia
- Piazza Farnese and Palazzo Farnese
- Campo de’ Fiori
- Church of Sant’Andrea della Valle
- Largo Argentina
- Church of the Gesù

(Total distance: 3.2Km)

Day 2 – From Piazza Farnese to St. John Lateran

- Piazza Venezia and Palazzo Venezia
- Capitoline Hill and Michelangelo’s Piazza del Campidoglio
- Via dei Fori Imperiali

- The Colosseum (exterior)
- Basilica of San Clemente
- Basilica dei Santissimi Quattro Coronati
- Basilica of Sant John in Lateran

(Total distance: 3.9Km)

Itinerary 2 – The Rome of Sixtus V: Obelisks, Axes, and Urban Order

Theme: Visionary Planning and the Baroque Metropolis

This itinerary focuses on the transformative urban project of Pope Sixtus V (1585–1590), whose ambition to rationalize and monumentalize Rome produced a new urban structure of straight visual corridors punctuated by obelisks and basilicas. His plan was among the earliest examples of city-wide reorganization based on axial geometry, anticipating the principles of Baroque urbanism and prefiguring later interventions in European capital cities.

The itinerary offers a diachronic reading of these urban gestures through critical stops at major ecclesiastical sites, palatial residences, symbolic crossroads, and landscape perspectives. Through Borromini and Bernini’s works, the group will also engage with the tension between geometry and emotion, between controlled vision and expressive form—themes that deeply marked seventeenth-century architecture.

The educational objective is to examine how Rome became a laboratory for integrated architectural and urban thinking, and to understand the role of planning in shaping symbolic landscapes of power, devotion, and civic identity.

Summary of Visits: Itinerary 2 – The Rome of Sixtus V (2 Mornings)

Day 1 – From Piazza del Popolo to Palazzo Barberini

- Piazza del Popolo and Porta del Popolo
- Church of Santa Maria del Popolo
- The Pincio and Villa Borghese → Piazza di Spagna
- Trinità dei Monti and Villa Medici
- Via Sistina → Palazzo Barberini
- Trevi Fountain
- The Quirinale Hill
- Church of San Andrea al Quirinale

(Total distance: 3.2Km)

Day 2 – From San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane to Saint John in Lateran

- Four Fountains intersection
- Church of San Carlino alle Quattro Fontane
- Church of Santa Maria della Vittoria (Cornaro Chapel)
- Piazza della Repubblica and Basilica of Santa Maria degli Angeli
- Obelisk and Basilica of Santa Maria Maggiore
- Basilica of Saint John in Lateran

(Total distance: 3.5Km)

Estimated Walking Distances

Each itinerary is designed to be comfortably completed within a morning session of approximately 3 hours, including time for stops and commentary.

Contact Person

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