

## Sightseeing Tours in Rome: St. Peter's Basilica and the Vatican

When you have planned to visit Rome, your main goal has to be to visit the vatican city. Since 1929 the vatican is considered the smallest country in the world and this historical area is visited every day by around 10.000 persons.

St. Peter's Cathedral completely dominates the Roman landscape. Its great dome, rising 448 feet, can be seen from most places in the city. The dome itself is a masterpiece of architecture designed by Michelangelo and the most audacious building scheme that had ever been attempted. The diameter is 142 feet-the same as that of the Pantheon -and Michelangelo spent the last sixteen years of his life making it "the most glorious miracle of art and beauty in the world."

The church is the largest in the world; its vestibule alone is 468 feet long and 66 feet high; but the church proper just swallows the visitor completely. Some authorities claim that 80,000 persons can be accommodated here. This figure seems a little high to me, but in any case many thousands can stand in this great building. I say stand because in none of the churches of Rome did I see seats-there just aren't any. Everything inside is in proportion to the large dimensions of the building. The statuary is gigantic in size. What appear to be large paintings here and there turn out to be beautiful mosaic work as one draws nearer. There are no paintings here-all are beautiful mosaics.

Of course, the church has to have its relics and the most important ones here are "the spear with which Longinus pierced the Saviour's side," a portion of "the true Cross," a veil bearing the impression of Christ's face and the head of Andrew. The so-called tomb of Peter is here too, and the many faithful gather round it to pray and to rain down upon it their gifts of money-paper money was lying all round the crypt.

Once entered on the right side you can admire the world's most beautiful sculpture, Michelangelo's "Pieta," showing the Saviour in His mother's arms after being taken down from the cross. Just opposite is a huge work showing Ignatius Loyola, founder of the Jesuits, treading on the neck of Luther and the latter, twined about with snakes, is being pushed into Hell. I saw the sign of the peacock, an old heathen symbol that I had seen in Ceylon and Babylon and Pergamos, entered right here in the church. And, of course, the high altar faces the east. A little further along is the old statue of Peter with its well-worn toe.

Being one of the four patriarchal Basilicas, the church has a "Holy Door" on which the pope knocks with a little gold hammer once every twenty-five years and the souls of all in purgatory escape to the realms of the blessed. Once you come out from the sistine chapel tour, the tour guide can lead you directly to the basilica dedicated to the first martyr of Rome, who rests exactly under the main altar decorated by the wonderful canopy of Bernini.

Source: <http://www.articlecircle.com>

### About the Author

If you want to discover the treasures of the vatican when sightseeing in Rome you can first visit <http://www.romanguide.com>