

# Upfront

A Roman reset. We returned to the Host-ess City from the Eternal City last night, and we are energized. A five-day trip in the second week of the New Year has sharpened the image of what 2026 can be.

Traveling soon after the flurry of winter holidays is not for everybody. The numbers confirm it. Airlines report January through early February to be the lowest-volume period of the year. Airfares are commensurately relatively low, as are hotel room rates. You feel like a local as you explore an uncrowded, quiet European capital. You get a reservation – or walk in on a whim – at restaurants that turn you away with a dismissive shrug in peak season. The native language gently caroms through timeless piazzas in a soothing hum.

Winter days are short and chilly in central Italy, just like they are here. Clear, crisp seasonal conditions make for stunning azure skies. Perfect light reveals the genius in the wall colors that artisans developed during the Renaissance. Some things are hard to improve upon, even if you have half a millennium to try. Warm earthy tones like burnt Siena and ochre and umber are honored and celebrated by afternoon midwinter sun.

Many New Year’s resolutions focus on self-denial. The elimination of things that have taken you past a comfortable point. But travel is about opening yourself to possibilities. It synthesizes aspirations. It encourages growth through addition rather than subtraction. It tends to reinforce your appreciation for what you already have, while hinting at what your future could be.

Imagine crossing the threshold into one of the grandest, most spiritually uplifting buildings on earth. Say...one of the four of the world’s major Papal Basilicas, which are all in Rome. You needn’t be Catholic to be blown away. But think of how cool it would be to find yourself completely alone inside one of these staggeringly magnificent engineering miracles in the middle of the day. That was us last week. The scale is humbling. The silence in transcendental. The beauty breaks and repairs your heart.

Speaking of beauty: “Age before beauty,” they say. But I have come to understand that my primal affection for the places I love most...the places that feel like home to me...don’t follow this commandment. In Savannah, as in Rome, age is beauty. As I am no longer young, I greatly appreciate the metaphor.

Walking through the ancient epicenter of a fantastical empire makes tangible the claim, “They don’t make ‘em like that anymore.” So does an afternoon amble up (which is actually down) Bull Street to Forsyth Park. A combination of developed efficiencies and shifting economics dictate this inevitable truth. Time is irreversible. Tastes evolve. Circumstances reframe the limits of the possible, not always for good.

The façade of an irreplicable building, whether antebellum Southern vintage or Imperial Rome, is arresting. It amazes you. It makes you consider your own legacy. Your legacy doesn’t require a massive structural monument; it can be much more subtle than that. But your tenure on earth is finite: Use it well.

These are the thoughts that bubble below your consciousness as you walk among the landmarks of history. You are in-the-moment fully satisfied and prospectively inspired. Each narrow cobblestone street willingly surrenders its enduring mystery to you. You press on, confident that there is always another incredible unknown thing just ahead.

And there’s the food. Your eyes and ears have already been seduced; you’re senses of taste and smell deserve the same.

We’re home again, in time to write this for you. We gratefully appreciate what has been, and imagine what is yet to be. Have an epic 2026.

*Scott A. Lawrence*

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