



A Museum Fit for a Pope

The newest museum to open its doors in the greater Rome area just happens to be a papal palace. **Tiffany Parks** takes you on a tour.

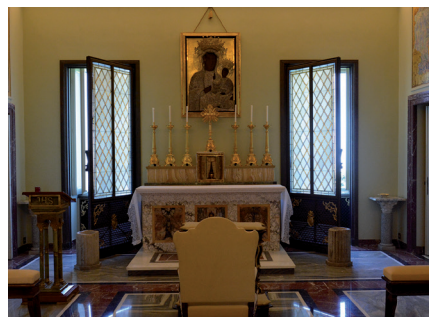
For centuries, the Apostolic Palace of Castel Gandolfo, a charming idyll on the shores of Lake Albano just 15 miles southeast of Rome, was the summer hideaway of the popes. Built upon the ruins of an ancient Roman villa belonging to Emperor Domitian, the palace was designed by the great baroque architect Carlo Maderno for Pope Urban VIII in the mid-17th century. Since then, the pontiffs have decamped here to escape the oppressive heat of the Roman summer, carrying out their papal duties from this lakeside retreat every July and August.

Until Pope Francis came along. When Jorge Bergoglio took the reins of the Catholic Church in hand in March of 2013, it became immediately clear the he was going to do things differently. For starters, he eschewed the Vatican's Apostolic Palace, preferring instead to live in just a handful of rooms of the humble Santa Marta Residence. And now, in an unexpected move that is delighting culture-lovers the world over, Pope Francis has decided to give up his vacation home and turn

the entire site into a public museum. Rooms that for centuries have been closed, locked, and zealously defended by Swiss Guards are now open to curious visitors for the first time ever.

The setting is arresting and evocative, with panoramas of the dazzlingly blue lake and hills covered with untouched forest visible from almost every window, and each room is teeming with history. Marvel at the Hall of the Swiss Guards, the Throne Room, where pontiffs held audience with distinguished guests,

and the Hall of the Consistory, a space reserved for the formal meetings of the College of Cardinals—until now, rarely seen by anyone outside the clergy. Even the most intimate rooms of the palace are now on public view, including the pope's own bedroom, where Pius XII famously hid women in labor during World War II, and the private chapel, where Pope Benedict and the newly elected Pope Francis took part in an absolute first in history: two popes praying together.



HOW TO GET THERE

By public transport: Take the Metro A to Anagnina, then a grab a blue Cotral bus to Castel Gandolfo. By train: Take the Rome–Albano line from Termini Station and get off at Castel Gandolfo. By car: Take the Strada Statale 7 “Via Appia Nuova” and follow the indications for Castel Gandolfo. www.museivaticani.va