

NOVEMBER 2013  
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Rome

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## DARK CITY

Explore Rome's spookiest sites,  
just in time for gloomy November

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  - QUIET MUSEUMS
  - DAY TRIP: CIVITA DI BAGNOREGIO



# where

» FOCUS

## A Walk on the Dark Side

by Tiffany Parks

*November is here. The days are getting colder and the city's getting darker. The first of the month is All Saints' Day, when Italians pay tribute to all Catholic saints, many of whom suffered horrific deaths. The following day, All Souls', is an occasion to honor loved ones who are no longer of this world. November in Rome is all about death, so get into the mood with a tour of these spooky spots.*

### Those Artful Bones

For lovers of the macabre, there's no more sinister place in Rome than the MUSEUM AND CRYPT OF THE CAPUCHINS, where the skeletons of more than 4000 monks have been used as eerie decoration. Hipbones become moldings, chandeliers dangle with leg and arm bones, and vertebrae make intricate cornices. In the last room, over a pile of bones and three reassembled skeletons sporting the famous Capuchin hood, an ominous sign reads, "What you are we once were; what we are you will become." **Via Veneto, 27.**

### Dungeons and Death

Although today CASTEL SANT'ANGELO is a magnificent palace and a fascinating museum, it wasn't always so. Up to the late 19th century, the dungeons of the castle were used to house prisoners, most famously Benvenuto Cellini and Giordano Bruno. The bridge right outside, with its Bernini angels (below), may look uplifting, but it was here that public executions took place, including the decapitation of 22-year-old Beatrice Cenci in 1599. The bridge was also the site of a stampede during the Jubilee of 1450, when more than 200 people were trampled to death or drowned. **Lungotevere Castello, 50.**

### On Hallowed Ground

Dubbed by Oscar Wilde "the holiest place in Rome," the exquisite NON-CATHOLIC CEMETERY (above) is reserved for Rome's Protestant, Orthodox, Jewish, and non-Christian dead, and is famously the resting place of John Keats, Percy Bysshe Shelley, and Goethe's only son. With its view of the



ancient Pyramid of Cestius, towering cypress trees, and tombstones and mausoleums that are works of art in themselves, this might just be the most enchanting cemetery in the world. **Via Caio Cestio, 6.**

### Death's Portal

St. Peter's Basilica has five sets of Bronze Doors, the most noted being the Holy Doors (open only on the occasion of a Holy Year) and the massive central Filarete doors, the only set original to the Constantine Basilica. Less well-known, but no less intriguing, are the DOORS OF DEATH, to the far left of the portico, used as the exit for funeral processions. Cast in the 1960s by Giacomo



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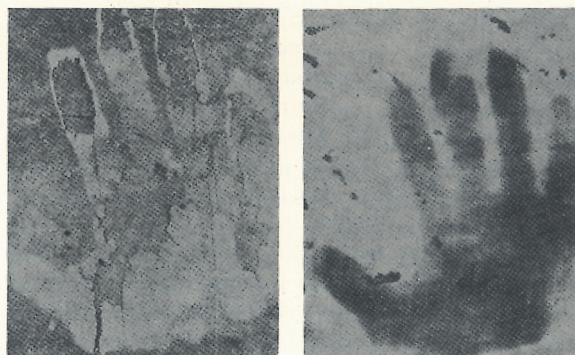
Manzù, the doors feature morbid scenes of crucifixions, hangings, and other martyrdoms, as well as the heads of vultures looking out ominously.

#### RIP John Doe

In Renaissance Rome, murder was practically considered a sport, and bodies floating in the Tiber were far from rare. From its convenient position just a few steps from the riverbanks, the friars of the church of SANTA MARIA DELL'ORAZIONE E MORTE (above) would fish the bodies out of the river, stack them in the cellar, and bury any that went unclaimed. The church is decorated with ghoulish images and boasts a cross made of human skulls. A chilling sign on the door reads, "Today for me, tomorrow for you." **Via Giulia, 262.**

#### Messages from Beyond the Grave

A tiny church in Prati has found a way to communicate with souls suffering in purgatory, and their annexed museum has proof. THE MUSEUM OF SOULS IN PURGATORY (below) displays fingerprints burned into a prayer book, a charred handprint on a wooden table, and other creepy evi-



dence that heaven's unpleasant waiting room might actually exist. **Lungotevere Prati, 12.**

#### Death is in the Air

As the site of the brutal deaths of an estimated 700,000 people, is it any wonder the COLOSSEUM is considered the most haunted building in the Europe? In the Middle Ages it was believed to be a gathering place for souls at unrest, and as late as the early 20th century, it was thought that the noxious fumes of the countless murders that took place here could be fatal to anyone who breathed them, particularly at night. Such was the fate of Henry James' heroine Daisy Miller, whose nighttime visit to the Colosseum proved deadly.