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## CELEBRATE!

Five ways to be a part of the Italian Republic's 70th birthday

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# *Long Live the* REPUBLIC!

This month marks Italy's 70th  
birthday as a republic.  
Tiffany Parks offers five ways to  
celebrate the occasion.



Bastille Day, Canada Day, the 4th of July... nearly every country has a special date in which its citizens shake the dust off their patriotic sentiments and celebrate the glory of their nation. For Italy, that date is the 2nd of June, Festa della Repubblica, and this year the celebration will be doubly exuberant, as 2016 marks the 70th anniversary of Italy's rebirth as a republic. On 2 June 1946, after the fall of Fascism, Italians voted in a historic referendum to do away with the monarchy.

Since it's a national holiday (and one of the most important on the calendar), many tourist sites will be closed for the day, but not to worry! In addition to celebratory events, a few rare sites are open to the public for this day only, giving visitors the chance to go where most Romans themselves have never set foot. Pick one (or more!) of the following ways to commemorate one of Italy's most patriotic holidays.

## Flight Show

The most exciting moment of the festivities is without a doubt when the legendary Italian acrobatic aerial team, the Frecce Tricolori, flies over the city, red, white, and green smoke trailing behind in perfect unison. All over town, the roaring plane engines draw people to their windows or balconies, out of shops and coffee bars as they try and catch a glimpse of the patriotic fliers. The ideal place to watch the action is Piazza Venezia, but the event draws heaving crowds, so be sure to come early to secure your spot. The festivities begin at 9:15am when a wreath is placed at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at the Victor Emmanuel Monument (also known as the Altar of the Fatherland), followed by the aeronautical spectacle.

## I Love a Parade!

Grab a miniature Italian flag and pretend you're a local for the day, cheering on the members of the armed forces in the military parade along Via dei Fori Imperiali following the Frecce Tricolori flyover. The towering ruins of the forums of Caesar, Augustus, and Trajan make a dramatic backdrop to the precision and discipline of the soldiers and statesmen, who cut dashing figures in true Italian style. Keep your eyes peeled for Sergio Mattarella, President of the Republic, who gives a speech every year for the occasion.

## Secret Garden

Perhaps the most anticipated event of day is the chance to get lost in the president's own gardens. The green space was originally a vineyard (which was in its turn built upon the ruins of the ancient Baths of Constantine and the Temple of Quirinus) that was transformed into a garden at the height of the Renaissance. Due to its position on the peak of the highest of Rome's seven hills, the 10-acre oasis gives

visitors a sense of being suspended on a lush, airy island, far from the chaos of the sizzling city. It was clearly no coincidence that this enviable spot was chosen for the site of the summer residence of the popes, the Quirinal Palace, named for the hill on which it perches. With the unification of Italy in 1861, the palace (and its spectacular garden) passed to the newly minted Italian royal family, and when Italy became a republic in 1946 (the very event this day celebrates), the palace became the official residence of the Italian president. The Quirinal Gardens are a botanical treasure only to be guessed at for 364 days a year. On 2 June, however, the garden is open to the public free of charge from 3 to 7pm. The variety of trees is astounding, including palms, magnolias, cycads, boxwoods, laurels, sequoias, and many more, and the flowers include rare species like Brazilian trithrinax and Queen of the Night (which only blooms at night), as well as virtually every kind of rose. Delicate fountains, ancient marble sculptures, sundials, and symmetrical paths make the space a delightful idyll in the middle of a teeming city. As if the visuals weren't enough, musicians from military and police bands serenade visitors throughout the afternoon. Be prepared for long lines, but for garden enthusiasts, the wait is worth it. Piazza del Quirinale.

## Call Me Madame

Palazzo Madama is another fascinating (and otherwise off-limits) site that is open today only. The palace was built at the end of the 15th century over the ruins of the ancient Baths of Nero, and has housed many notable historic figures over the centuries. Two of the Renaissance's most cunning cardinals called it home (both, no surprise, went on to become pope), as well as the infamous Catherine de' Medici and later Madama Margherita of Austria—who married the illegitimate son of Holy Roman Emperor Charles V—and for whom the palace was named. Today the imposing building is the seat of the Italian senate, hence its elusive status. But on 2 June you can enjoy a free tour of a dozen richly decorated rooms, each more lavish than the next. The highlight of the tour is the senate meeting hall, which features frescoes by Cesare Maccari depicting four scenes from the ancient Roman senate. Come early to avoid long lines. Piazza Madama, 11.

## For the Politically Minded

Are you fascinated by the minutiae of Italian politics? If so—or if you just want an unusual souvenir of your trip—stop by the official parliament bookshop, Libreria Arion Montecitorio. On 2 June you can pick up a free copy of the Italian Constitution, as well as a red-white-and-green pin to show your status as an honorary Italian for the day. Piazza di Monte Citorio, 59.

