



On the Tosca Trail

Book tickets to see the Teatro dell'Opera's new production of *Tosca*, then take a *Tosca*-inspired tour of Rome. **Tiffany Parks** leads the way.



If you had been in Rome on the night of 14 January 1900, you could have witnessed the world premiere of Puccini's masterpiece *Tosca* at the Teatro Costanzi (p53). Over a century later, *Tosca* is one of the most frequently performed operas in the classical canon, and undoubtedly the most thoroughly Roman one ever written. In an exciting new production, the Teatro dell'Opera di Roma is using the original sketches and notes from the 1900 premiere to recreate, as authentically as possible, what that very first performance must have been like. And as the new production will be performed at Teatro Costanzi as well, the principal theater of Rome's opera company still today, attending it will almost be like traveling back in time.

But to truly appreciate *Tosca's* timeless appeal, to immerse yourself in the passion and intrigue of the dramatic story, what better way than to visit the Roman landmarks where each of the acts takes place? Set in Rome in 1800, during the French domination of the city, the opera tells the story of the impetuous singer Floria Tosca, and her mission to save the man she loves from persecution by the corrupt government. Along the way, Tosca experiences jealousy, obsession, and betrayal, all culminating with the dramatic final act, when she throws herself to her death off the ramparts of Castel Sant'Angelo. Walk across the city in the footsteps of the heroine, and get to know this incredible opera from the inside out.



Act I: Jealousy in Church

With as many eye-popping churches as Rome has, it's really no surprise that Sant'Andrea della Valle (Corso Vittorio Emanuele II) (right) is not on most tourist agendas. Ironically, it would probably be considered the most important church in town, were it in any other city. But opera lovers have a special place in their hearts for this underrated baroque church. The first time we hear *Tosca's* voice is when she calls to her lover Cavaradossi while he is painting inside the church. In this scene, we encounter *Tosca's* irrational jealousy, as well as her intense passion for Cavaradossi. If jealousy is Act I's theme, the backdrop of art found in the church couldn't be more appropriate. The dome—at the time of completion the third largest in the city after St. Peter's and the Pantheon—provided an excellent opportunity to showcase an artist's talent, so naturally the commission was one of the most prestigious of its day. The artists in contention were two baroque painters, Giovanni Lanfranco and Domenichino. Lanfranco was the original pick, but was passed over for Domenichino, who had more influential connections. But after Domenichino had completed the frescoes in the apse half-dome and spandrels, the patron changed his mind again, this time in favor of Lanfranco, a crushing blow to Domenichino's ambitions. Although the result is a spectacular monument to baroque art, the jealousy-inducing conditions, as well as working in such close proximity to one another, sparked an artistic rivalry that would last their entire careers.



Act II: Murder at the Palace

The second act of Puccini's masterpiece takes place at imposing Palazzo Farnese, an enormous brick building that dominates the eponymous piazza, just a few blocks from the church of Act I. The High Renaissance palace took several decades to complete, and was designed by architects such as Antonio da Sangallo the Younger, Giacomo della Porta, and Michelangelo, with rooms and galleries frescoed by the Carracci brothers. The drama continues as Tosca visits the private office of Baron Scarpia, the corrupt chief of police, to plead for her now-imprisoned lover's release. As she tries in vain to have Cavaradossi spared from execution for aiding enemies of state, she soon realizes that Scarpia has other, more nefarious intentions. Faced with the choice between sending her lover to his death and submitting to Scarpia's lewd advances, a desperate Tosca chooses the latter, only to kill Scarpia as soon as he has signed the couple's document of safe passage. Today the palace is the site of the French Embassy, and it's not the easiest place to visit; in fact, not long ago, it was nearly impossible for non-VIPs to gain entrance. Luckily for us *Tosca* lovers, with a little bit of advanced planning, it's no longer quite so off-limits. Guided tours are organized by the Inventerome cultural association, and must be booked at least one week in advance at www.inventerome.com.

Act III: Suicide from the Castle

To conclude your *Tosca* tour, cross town to Castel Sant'Angelo (p55), the striking medieval fortress built out of the 2nd-century mausoleum of Emperor Hadrian. It is dawn, and the day of Cavaradossi's execution has arrived. As he prepares to meet his death on the castle's battlements, Tosca assures him that Scarpia has promised to simulate the execution only. The guns are loaded with blanks, and Cavaradossi must simply pretend to die. But once the guns have fired, Tosca realizes only too quickly that Scarpia has betrayed her. The execution was, in fact, real, and her lover is dead. Moments before being arrested herself for Scarpia's murder, Tosca throws herself to her death from the battlements of the castle. As grisly as the final scene of *Tosca* certainly is, Castel Sant'Angelo has, in reality, witnessed even more gruesome horrors throughout its long history. The castle's dungeons housed and tortured enemies of the church until as recently as the late-19th century. Philosopher Giordano Bruno, painter Bevenuto Cellini, and astronomer Galileo were all confined within its grimy walls. Countless more prisoners met their deaths either on the battlements like Cavaradossi, or on the bridge directly in front of the castle. One of these was the tragic young Beatrice Cenci, beheaded for plotting the murder of her abusive father. A visit to the sinister castle, now a museum, is an absolute must for any opera fanatic, and it also provides one of the most breath-taking views of the city.