

AUGUST 2014
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AGE OF AUGUSTUS

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THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS

*"I inherited Rome a city of brick;
I left it a city of marble."*

—Caesar Augustus

Take a tour of Augustus' Rome, just in time to commemorate the death of Rome's first emperor, exactly 2000 years ago. Tiffany Parks explains how.

It's not every day that the 2000th anniversary of anything comes along. But this month, the death of Rome's most beloved leader exactly two millennia ago will see the city come out in full force to remember the life of this extraordinary man, the civic projects he was responsible for, and the wide-spread peace he brought to his realm. Gaius Octavius, better known as Emperor Augustus, breathed his last on 19 August in the year 14 AD. During his 41-year reign (the longest of any Roman emperor), Augustus built enduring monuments, developed the city's infrastructure, and established the Pax Romana, the empire's most enduring period of peace.

Augustus wore many hats, and carried many titles. He was known as Princeps (the "first" citizen of Rome), Divi Filius (the son of the divine, in reference to his great-uncle and adopted father, the deified Julius Caesar), Augustus (illustrious one), Pater Patriae (father of his country), and of course, Caesar, a family name that would eventually come to be synonymous with the term "emperor." His official roles were just as varied, from Consul (Rome's highest elected office) to Pontifex Maximus (high priest) and eventually Imperator (military commander).

CITY OF MARBLE

The best way to appreciate Augustus's footprint on the fabric of his city is to take a tour of the works he built. Perhaps the most recognizable of the monuments in his legacy is the **Ara Pacis** (left) (p53). Although the first years of his reign were marred by war, Augustus's dedication to restoring peace to the empire was what set him apart from the leaders who would follow him. The majestic white marble Altar of Peace was inaugurated in 9 BC to celebrate the peace brought to the empire by Augustus's military victories in Hispania and Gaul. Although partially reconstructed, the altar nevertheless possesses much of its original bas-relief decoration, depicting Roman myths, scenes of ritual sacrifice, intricate garlands, and a procession of Augustus and other members of the imperial family.

In the heart of the Imperial Fora, found partially excavated alongside right and left of Via dei Fori Imperiali, the **Forum of Augustus** (p57) was the physical representation of Augustus's power. The forum incorporates the Temple of Mars Ultor (the avenging god of war) and was at the time considered "greater than any in ex-

istence." While not completed until 2 BC, the temple was first planned by Augustus after he successfully avenged Caesar, killing his assassins Brutus and Cassius in 42 BC. Just in time for the big anniversary, the forum comes to life in a summer-long project that helps visitors experience the site as it once was. Every night, a multimedia show recreates the original appearance of the forum. Audience members are provided with earphones with audio in six languages, while the images and animation are projected onto the walls of the forum (below).

Unlike the emperors who would succeed him, Augustus lived not in an opulent palace but in a comfortable, tasteful home. He chose to live on the Palatine Hill (p53), as would his successors, to underline his connection to Romulus and Remus, the twin founders of Rome who were raised, according to legend, on the very same hill seven centuries earlier, and where Augustus himself was born. Despite its relatively small size, the **House of Augustus** is celebrated for its superb second-style Pompeian frescoes in vibrant red, black, yellow, purple, and green. See the glorious and well-pre-

served works in several rooms, including the mysterious Room of the Masks and Augustus's own study, an intimate haven he called "Siracusa."

Built in 28 BC, the **Mausoleum of Augustus** (Piazza Augusto Imperatore) is perhaps the most neglected of Rome's ancient sights. Over the centuries, it has been the victim of cannon fire, earthquake, abandonment, and vandalism, and during its long life has been used as a fortress, a bullring, and a concert hall. But thanks to sturdy defensive walls, some 15 feet thick and 50 feet tall, the site has survived against all odds. Although the mausoleum has been closed for decades, this year's milestone has been the impetus for the city to pledge €12 million to its restoration and eventual reopening.

A few other sites not to miss: the **Theater of Marcellus** (p58), an imposing performing arts center and the

» DID YOU KNOW?

Since the month Quintilius was renamed July for Julius Caesar, the Roman Senate decided to equally honor Augustus, changing the name of the warm summer month of Sextilius to August.



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*"If I have played my part well,
clap your hands, and dismiss me
with applause from the stage."*

—Caesar Augustus



second-largest theater in ancient Rome, was built by Augustus in 13 BC and is crowned by a still-inhabited palace built in the Renaissance. The theater's purpose is revived this month with musical performances staged just outside the towering structure. The **Portico of Octavia** (Via di Portico d'Ottavia) is another Augustean site, once a vast cultural and religious center, although sadly little survives today beyond its entrance gate. The **Obelisk of Montecitorio** (Piazza Montecitorio) was brought from Egypt by in 10 BC to be used as the pointer of Augustus' massive sundial that spread across the Campus Martius neighborhood. The 70-foot monolith cast a shadow across the Ara Pacis on Augustus's birthday, a not-so-subtle hint that he was born to bring peace to the empire.

THE FACE OF POWER

Get to know the man up close by studying one (or more) of his many portraits, located in museums across the city. By far the most

famous is the **Augustus of Prima Porta**. This larger-than-life-sized marble sculpture depicting Augustus in the role of *imperator*, or military commander, was discovered in 1863 in the ruins of the Villa of Livia, in an area that was once countryside and is now on the northern outskirts of the city. The commanding work now has its residence in the Braccio Nuovo section of the Vatican Museums (p53). Also displayed at the Vatican, in the welcoming Pinecone Courtyard, is an enormous posthumous portrait of the **Divine Augustus** (left), discovered in the 16th century on the Aventine Hill.

Another celebrated portrait is the **Augustus of Via Labicana** (on cover). Located today at the National Roman Museum at Palazzo Massimo (p55), this moving work represents a togaed Augustus in his role as Pontifex Maximus, Rome's spiritual leader. The Hall of the Emperors at the Capitoline Museums (p55) displays the **Ottaviano Capitolino**, an important early bust of Augustus, showing him as an ambitious, determined, yet vulnerable young man. But you don't have to visit a museum to find a portrait of Rome's favorite leader. A modern bronze copy of the Prima Porta statue stands in front of Augustus's forum along Via dei Fori Imperiali (above).

The Art of Command

You may have missed the blockbuster exhibit dedicated to Augustus at the Scuderie del Quirinale this past winter, but you are in time to see another one. Contemporary architect Richard Meier's sleek **Ara Pacis Museum** (p53) hosts an exhibition dedicated to the art of power, command, and, in particular, how Augustus's reign

inspired the ruling style of other world leaders, such as Charlemagne, Emperor Charles V, and Napoleon. See 120 works of art and artifacts from Italy's most important museums.

